

I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again!

Author Milli-gram

Illustrator Yuki Kana

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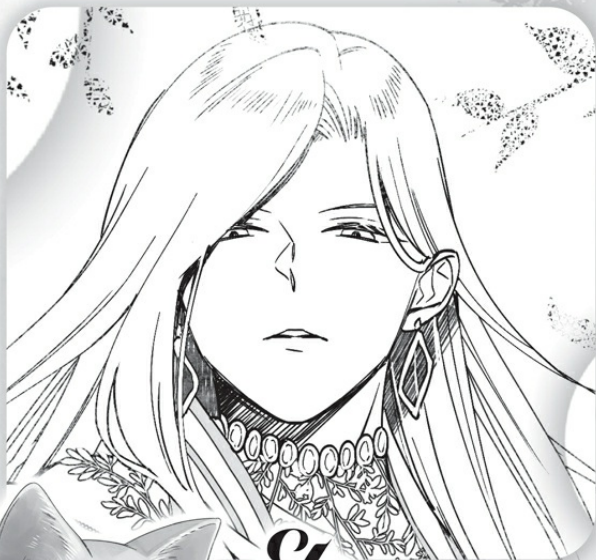
Author
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Glen

A young man possessing a Sage-level [Appraisal] Skill who visited Baron Eucharis's estate for an appraisal. He helps Chelsea after learning about the abuse she endured.



Ele

The Spirit King. Appeared from the "Spirit Tree of Origin" that Chelsea created with her Skill. Taking her as his master, they formed a contract. Normally takes the form of a kitten.



Characters

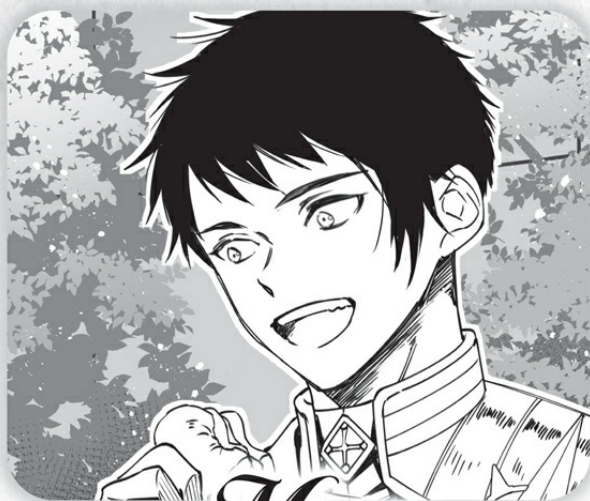
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Character Introductions

Chelsea

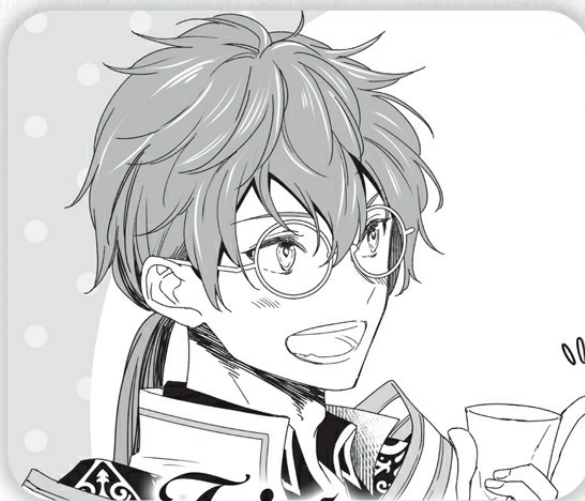
A noble's daughter who was called a failure and tyrannized by her mother and younger twin sister. After awakening to the brand-new Skill [Seed Creation], she came to the Royal Research Institute.





Marx

Deputy Commander of the Kingdom of Chronowise's Second Order of Knights, and son of Margrave Sargent. Is engaged to his aide, Stacey.



Tristano

A researcher assigned to Chelsea as her helper. Has a cheerful personality and is called "Tris" by those close to him. User of [Earth Magic].



Royz

A dragon beastman who regained his seat as the Radzuel Empire's Emperor. After Chelsea planted a Spirit Tree cutting, he entered into a contract with the Fire Spirit, Irene.



Micah

A foxwoman Chelsea met in the Radzuel Empire. A wonderful chef, who was brought back to Chronowize to be Chelsea's personal chef.



Gina

One of Chelsea's personal maids. A reliable woman with slightly droopy eyes. Her trademark is her braid.



Martha

One of Chelsea's personal maids. Has a bright and energetic personality, and is easily moved to tears. Her trademark is her ponytail.

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I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again!

Prologue

My name is Chelsea. I'm the adopted daughter of Margrave Sargent, a research fellow at the Royal Research Institute, and the contractor of the Spirit King Ele...

I've gained a lot of titles, but the most recent one is "Lord Glen's fiancée". To think that a year ago I was living through abuse in the barony of my birth, yet here I was engaged to Lord Glen, younger brother of the king and a nationally recognized appraiser.

I'd say the fact that I sometimes had to pinch myself to figure out whether I was dreaming or not was quite understandable.

"Chelsea? We're nearly there, but... Why are you pinching your cheek?" asked Lord Glen, who had been sitting across from me in the carriage on the way back to the capital from the Sargent Margraviate.

I quickly pulled my hand away from my cheek, resting it on my lap.

"No, it's nothing," I answered, shaking my head lightly.

Lord Glen gave me a confused look. His deep-blue hair, reminiscent of the night sky, sparkled in the light coming through the window, while his blue eyes that just seemed to suck you in stared at my face.

"You won't tell me what you're thinking about?" he responded, tilting his head to the side.

Seeing him do this, I couldn't stay silent. "Honestly, um... Sometimes I just can't believe that I'm really your fiancée..." I told him the truth behind why I pinched my cheek, despite my embarrassment.

After a few blinks, Lord Glen let out a happy chuckle, then said, "You absolutely are my fiancée, Chelsea."

My heart skipped a beat as he gave me a different smile than usual. *But to think he'd ever say that!* My heart felt as if it was being squeezed... And at the

same time, my cheeks heated up.

“If possible, I’d much prefer you just look at your engagement ring rather than pinching yourself on the cheek,” he continued with another laugh, pointing at my right hand on my lap.

On my right ring finger was the engagement ring Lord Glen had given me. On it was a stone the same blue as his eyes. The ring was a magic tool that would automatically cast defensive magic if the wearer was in danger, and it wouldn’t come off easily. Since he’d asked me to save my left ring finger for my wedding ring, I was wearing it on my right.

“All right. I’ll do that next time,” I said with a nod, looking between my ring and his eyes. *From now on, I’ll look at the ring and remember Lord Glen’s eyes instead.*

While I was thinking that, the carriage stopped in front of the Royal Research Institute’s entrance. The knights guarding us opened the doors from the outside, and Lord Glen got out first before holding a hand out to help me down. As I took it and stepped out of the carriage, I saw a building the same gray color as the palace to my right...and someone in a white robe with a red stole running out of the institute in our direction.

The one who ran up to us out of breath was the son of Marquis Forium, Lord Tris, who was also helping me study my [Seed Creation] Skill. For some reason, he stopped about ten steps from me before opening his eyes wide in shock, yelling, “Welcome home, Miss Chelsea! You’ve grown a lot, huh?!”

“I’m finally back home. I had a growth spurt after falling ill with a mana fever,” I replied.

After planting the Spirit Tree cutting in the nearby Radzuel Empire, I fell ill with a mana fever and had to stay in the Sargent Margraviate to recuperate. A mana fever occurs when the mana pool inside of you falls out of balance with your body. After the fever subsides, you have a growth spurt as your body tries to match the size of your mana pool. Thanks to that, I’d grown to be just a little bit shorter than the average twelve-year-old.

“I heard all about that. But I didn’t think you’d get this big!” Lord Tris said with a few nods as he walked towards me. Then, when he was about a step away, he

smiled and said, “And not only did you grow, but you’re more ladylike! That ring looks great on you!”

Since you could take off normal engagement rings and put them back on, they went on your left ring finger before being switched out with your wedding ring at your ceremony. Lord Tris must have thought I was wearing it for fashion since it was on my right ring finger.

“Th-Thank you very much,” I said, giving him a smile.

Next, he looked over at Lord Glen. “Welcome back to you too, Lord Glen. Wait...what’s with that murderous look?”

I glanced up at Lord Glen, but I didn’t see anything like what Lord Tris was saying.

“You must have been imagining things...”

“Really? Doesn’t really matter, but... Ah! More importantly, where’s my souvenir?” Lord Tris asked, holding out his hands.

“It isn’t quite a souvenir, but...” With that warning, I willed the bracelet made from a Spirit Tree branch on my wrist to give me back a bag of seeds. When I did, the bag popped into existence in front of my eyes.

“Where the heck did that come from?!” he cried out in shock as he reached out to catch the bag.

The Spirit Tree bracelet that I got from Ele was connected to a personal storage room for me in the Spirit World, and I could put anything I wanted inside. When I wanted something back, I could either will it back or verbally whisper it, and whatever it was would pop out in front of my eyes. Since the items always came flying out, I dropped a lot of things before I got used to catching them.

After I explained all of that to Lord Tris, he nodded in understanding. “So what is this?”

“While I was recuperating, I did some research on my Skill on my own. During my research, I created a variety of seeds, so I thought that they might be good to study...”

Before I even finished speaking, he'd excitedly reached in the bag and pulled out a seed. The one he'd grabbed was round and flat like a coin, and had a picture of a fork, spoon, and knife in the middle.



“This...doesn’t look anything like a seed, y’know?!” Lord Tris’s jaw dropped as he stared at it.

Lord Glen gave it a serious look before saying, “I just appraised it, but it’s incredibly interesting. It’s called an ‘Experimental Cutlery Seed,’ and it produces a single set of wooden cutlery consisting of a fork, spoon, and knife. Since it’s experimental, it only lasts for one generation, and they rot after a night.”

“I experimented with many different things, but I’ve found that I can create seeds to make anything as long as it’s wooden,” I added.

As long as I had a proper blueprint, I could even create a seed that could sprout into a table and chairs. Putting an illustration of whatever the seed would grow into onto the seeds themselves was the best thing I could think of.

Still looking shocked, Lord Tris put the Experimental Cutlery Seed back in the bag before pulling out another one. This one was round and light blue, and had the same type of little cork in it as the Elixir Seed and Aopo Seed.

“What’s this one?” he asked, holding it in the palm of his hand.

“This one’s a ‘Fruit Water Seed,’ and it’s got fruit water inside, just as the name suggests. It also says it tastes great,” Lord Glen explained, having used his [Appraisal] Skill again. “This one is another single generation one, huh?”

“This is the best souvenir ever! I wanna plant ’em and check ’em out ASAP! No, I wanna try drinking the Fruit Water Seed first!” cheered Lord Tris as he returned the seed to the bag.

While we were all talking, the second carriage arrived. Ele, the Spirit King who spent most of his time in the form of a cat, hopped out. Since my total mana had increased, he now looked like an adult cat instead of a kitten, and seemed a bit more graceful.

«I will check on the Spirit Tree,» the silver-furred Ele murmured, floating up into the air before flying towards the Spirit Tree planted directly beside the Royal Research Institute.

“Hm? What’s up with him?” Lord Tris asked, looking confused.

When Ele was in cat form, only people who were contracted with a Spirit or

had the [Appraisal] Skill could understand him. Apparently everyone else just heard meowing.

After I explained that he was just going to check on the tree, Lord Tris smiled brightly. “He’s still just going at his own pace, huh?”

I nodded in agreement while Lord Glen just gave a strained smile.

Next, Micah the foxwoman (also my personal chef) stepped outside.

“We’re finally here~!” she said, immediately stretching. Then she walked up to stand next to me.

Having been watching her, Lord Tris gave her a big smile. “Hello! My name’s Tristano. I’m researching Miss Chelsea’s Skill with her. You must be...Miss Micah, right?”

“Yep! I’m Micah the foxwoman~!” she replied, twirling in place before giving Lord Tris a smile of her own. She’d done the same twirl when we first met her in the Sargent Margraviate. “I’m Chelsea’s personal chef~! ...But how do you know me?”

“I heard all about you from Lord Glen. He told me you could make some great stuff. He spoke so highly of your cooking... I wanna try it too!”

Miss Micah’s tail wagged side to side at his words. “I guess I’ll just have to cook you up something good if you’re gonna compliment me like that, Lord Tristano!”

“Really?! I can’t wait! Oh yeah, and you can just call me Tris!”

“Roger!”

Lord Tris and Miss Micah hit it off in no time, bumping their fists together. After that, they started chatting about what he wanted to eat, and what she could make.

I’m jealous of how quickly they became friends... I thought to myself as I watched them.

+ + +

Leaving the two men behind, Miss Micah and I headed inside the brown brick

building...the Royal Research Institute's lodging house. Once we were inside, we turned left down the hallway. I gave the two knights standing there a little nod, and got grins back.

Miss Micah's eyes had been darting around everywhere since we'd come inside. Her eyes gleamed in excitement. She might have thought it a bit strange, since it was built differently from buildings in Radzuel.

After walking a little bit further, we stopped in front of a strong-looking black door.

"These are my quarters," I told the foxwoman, before opening the door.

Inside was my large room, and my six personal maids stood lined up at the ready.

"Welcome home, Lady Chelsea," they said in unison the moment we stepped inside, giving me a bow.

"I'm home."

I've been away for over half a year... This is kinda embarrassing, I thought as I gave them a smile, and they all smiled happily back.

Then Martha and Gina, who had been assigned to me first, walked closer.

"You've grown so much while recuperating."

"I'd heard the news, but you really are taller, and even a bit more filled out!"

Gina was tearing up a little, while Martha gave me a huge smile.

"Yes. The margraviate's physician informed me that I've grown to the proper size for a twelve-year-old."

They looked a bit shocked when I said that. *I wonder why?*

When I gave them a confused look, Martha explained, "We were just surprised to hear you speaking like a proper lady. You must have studied hard!"

I was very glad to hear that my hard work had paid off. While I stood there simply being happy, Gina's gaze fell on Miss Micah, who had been standing behind me.

"It's wonderful to meet you. I'm Gina, head of Lady Chelsea's group of

personal maids.”

“Nice to meet you too~! I’m Micah, a beastwoman! I’m Chelsea’s personal chef!”

The two smiled at each other after giving their introductions.

“His Majesty has told us about you. But we’d like for you to become one of Lady Chelsea’s personal maids from now on,” said Gina before explaining further.

Since I was a research fellow at the Research Institute, Miss Micah would need to use the institute’s kitchen to make my meals. But since that kitchen was built to make food for large groups, it wouldn’t have the utilities or supplies for her to cook only my portions.

“Since we imagined you wouldn’t want to work in the kitchen as a normal chef, we thought it would be best for you to become one of Lady Chelsea’s personal maids and use the kitchen in this room.”

I didn’t even think of where Miss Micah would actually work! As I looked around in a fluster, Martha smiled at me.

“His Highness has everything under control,” she said. “You needn’t worry about a thing, Lady Chelsea. You’re also still a minor anyway, so just leave this all to the adults.”

It was true that I was still only twelve. I had three years until I’d be an adult. *But is it really okay to leave everything to them?!*

While I panicked, Miss Micah crossed her arms and looked at the kitchen. “I’m all for becoming one of Chelsea’s personal maids~! And I’ve got no problem with cooking in her room, since it’ll mean I can give her her meals all nice and hot,” she said, walking towards it. “But I do have a problem with how little I’ll be able to make in this modest kitchen.”

The kitchen in my room was just a tiny thing, with a single magical burner, a little sink, and an itty-bitty refrigerator. It was big enough to make tea, but that was about it.

Standing in front of the kitchen, Miss Micah used *Clean* to wash her hands

before pulling out a pan and ingredients and whipping up an omelet. Then she split it into eight pieces, putting each piece on a small plate from her Item Box, and passed them out to everyone present. All the maids looked a bit at a loss, being handed a plate so suddenly.

“It’s a sweet omelet. Try it~!” Miss Micah encouraged everyone, eating her portion to show it wasn’t poisoned. Her tail wagged, so it must have come out well.

When I saw that, I cut a bite-sized piece off of my own portion before putting it in my mouth.

“Delicious...!” Miss Micah’s sweet omelet looked simple, but the taste was a relief, making it a hit in the Sargent Margraviate.

After seeing my reaction, Gina immediately took a bite, and gave a bewitching smile afterwards. Martha had already finished hers, and was looking sadly at her empty plate. When the other maids ate their pieces, they all chattered about how delicious it was.

“Aww, I wanna cook something even better~” lamented Miss Micah.

I could have sworn that Gina and Martha’s eyes glinted when she said that.

“This is exactly the kind of thing we’ll need His Highness to handle.”

“Yes! Let’s have him redo this entire kitchen!”

All the other maids smiled and nodded along at the suggestion.

“By the way, what other things can you cook?”

Miss Micah thought for a moment before starting to whip something else up. She ended up making three dishes. First, she made tomato and cheese dressed with her specialty dressing. Second was fried potatoes and bacon covered in various spices, which filled the room with their unique scents. Last was lightly toasted bite-sized bits of bread topped with cheese.

“These are the kinds of things I can make with the current kitchen. Since I made them so quick, there isn’t much~” she explained, putting a bite of each onto everyone’s plates. Then we all ate our samples.

“Your cooking is always so delicious, Miss Micah,” I quietly praised.

“I’m glad you like it~! It makes cooking worth it~” Miss Micah’s tail wagged in response to my praise.

In the end, she became one of my personal maids with a focus on cooking, and would live in a separate room in the lodging house like the other maids.

1. Future Plans

The next morning, I woke to the sounds of my curtains being opened. I must have really been tired, because I hadn't noticed anyone coming into my room.

"Good morning, Lady Chelsea."

"Good morning, Gina."

After I replied from my bed, Gina looked right at me. "Are you tired from your journey? If you feel off at all, please tell us immediately."

It seemed that she was really worried after I spent half a year recuperating back in my family's home.

"I slept well, so I'm fine."

Gina looked relieved after I said that. "Let's get you ready for the day."

Then I washed my face, fixed my hair, and put on a dress. Since I'd grown taller, all of my outfits were from the Sargent Margraviate.

"Lady Chelsea, you've really grown so much," Gina murmured, looking at me in awe.

For the span of time until my kitchen was renovated, I would be eating what the head chef made me like usual, but... The portions brought out for my breakfast were bigger than they were when my stomach was smaller, but it still wasn't enough food for me now.

"Chelsea can eat a lot more nowadays~ This is too little!" muttered Miss Micah before heading to the room's kitchen to make me a little bit more.

On the table were the bread, soup, salad, crispy bacon, and scrambled eggs made by the head chef. Accompanying them were the potato salad and ham and lettuce sandwiches made by Miss Micah. They were all small portions, but there were more dishes than before.

"Looking at it like this, you can really tell that Lady Chelsea can eat more now..." said Gina, giving me another look of awe after seeing all the food on the

table.

After saying my prayers to the earth gods, I ate the breakfast that the head chef and Miss Micah made for me. Since I'd been eating nothing but Miss Micah's food during my stay at the margraviate, the head chef's food felt a bit nostalgic.

"Miss Martha got everything okayed~! The kitchen should be renovated in no time!" Miss Micah declared, tail wagging.

"It's quite amazing that you've got all the permission necessary the morning after deciding things," I said after swallowing what was in my mouth.

While I was taking a break after finishing my breakfast, a messenger came from His Majesty the King, telling me to come to his office once I was dressed.

As soon as the messenger left, Gina used a bell to call the rest of the maids from their waiting room.

"Lady Chelsea will be heading to His Majesty's office once she is dressed," she said, causing all the maids' gazes to fall on me.

If I was going to meet the king, I'd need to put on my formal clothing... A gown. If it was urgent, I would be able to go in whatever I was wearing now, but they specified "once I am dressed," which meant they wanted me to change first...

Steeling myself, I nodded.

"We'll polish you right up, Lady Chelsea!"

The maids all got to work at Gina's words. I could only go along with them, getting in the bath, being massaged... I'd learned a lot of things to try to become a proper lady, but I could never get used to all this. Taking off my clothes in front of other people, being washed—it was all so embarrassing...!

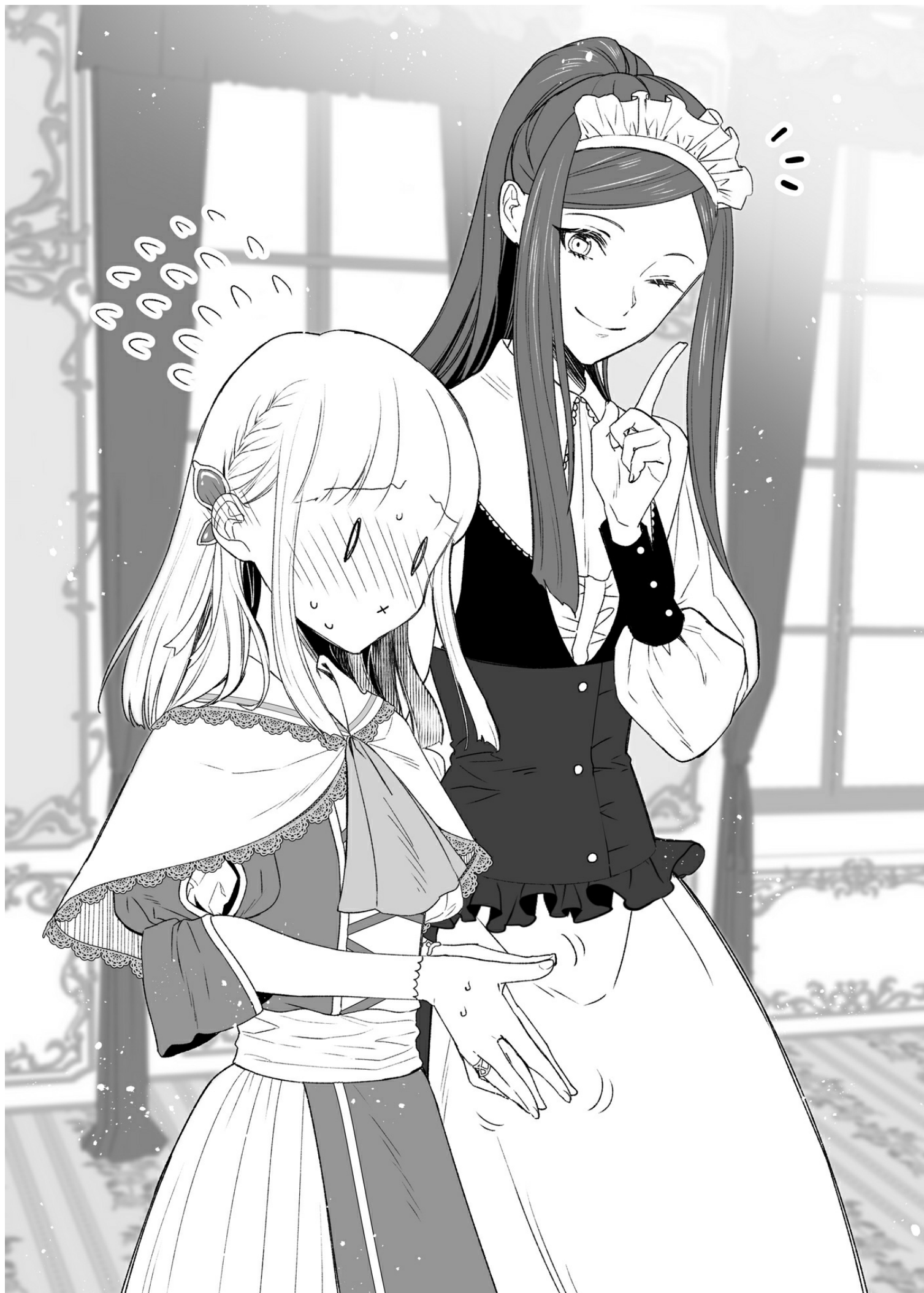
Once we reached the gown-choosing stage, Martha looked at me with a smile. "Let's pick a gown that goes well with your ring."

"Could it be that... You all know about my engagement...?" I whispered quietly, only to get a big nod back.

"Since it hasn't been officially announced, we won't say a word of it, but all of

us maids know.”

I’d thought that the fact that none of them commented on the ring when I first got there meant they didn’t know. My cheeks suddenly started burning in embarrassment.



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Once I was all ready, my guardian knights led me to the king's office. After being given permission, I entered the door and saw not only His Majesty inside, but Lord Glen as well.

The king was relaxing on a single-seat sofa, with a grin on his face. Across from him on a three-seat sofa was Lord Glen, who seemed a bit tired as he smiled at me.

"Good of you to come. Have a seat beside Glen," His Majesty urged.

I sat down as the maids deftly set out some tea and sweets. After they were done, they left the room. Now it was only the three of us. I couldn't help but swallow hard, thinking that we would be talking about something important.

"Oh, don't look so worried," said His Majesty, chuckling like a demon lord, before taking a sip of tea.

Being told not to worry makes me worry even more...! I thought while squeezing my fists on top of my lap.

"Everything is fine. We're just here to talk about what will happen next," Lord Glen followed up.

Having noticed how nervous I was, Lord Glen reached over and covered my hand with his. His warmth seeped into me. Thanks to that, I felt at least a bit of tension leave my body. I gave him a little nod and a smile to tell him I was okay, and he smiled back.

"I didn't even know you could make that sort of face, Glen," His Majesty murmured, smirking as he looked at his younger brother. Lord Glen was still smiling, but he wouldn't look at him.

"Could it be...that you're embarrassed?" I let slip unintentionally, only for his face to go bright red. The hand that wasn't holding mine went up to hide his face.

Oh no... Lord Glen is so cute...!

"Pfha ha ha... I've never seen him like that before. Good job, Chelsea."

The king tried to stifle his laughter, only to get a glare from Lord Glen.

“Now then, since you seem to have calmed down a bit, let’s get down to business.” He started on the topic of what Lord Glen and I would do from now on. “First of all... In our kingdom, happy occasions for the royal family get grand announcements.”

When the first prince had been born four years ago, I’d heard that the whole country had been in a celebratory mood, with lively parties everywhere you’d look.

“Which means... Glen, as the younger brother of the king, will need a grand announcement for his engagement to you, Chelsea.”

I nodded at His Majesty’s words. Mother and grandmother had given me a basic rundown of what would happen, and Lord Glen had elaborated further on our way back from the margraviate. Since it was something necessary for me to stay by Lord Glen’s side, I was ready for it.

“Considering preparation time, the plan is to announce it in six months. Any objections?”

Lord Glen shook his head no, so I did as well.

“I’m not going to tell you to hide it until it’s announced, but...hold yourselves back, all right? Especially you, Glen.”

The moment he heard His Majesty’s words, Lord Glen frowned. *What did he mean by “hold ourselves back”?* I tilted my head in confusion, only to get a smirk from the king in return.

“You’ll understand someday. Don’t worry about it right now. So...”

I still didn’t get it, but he kept going.

“The plan is to announce it at a royally hosted party.”

“If it will be at a party, won’t we need Chelsea to make her social debut beforehand?” asked Lord Glen, getting a strong nod back from his older brother.

A social debut was a rite of passage for nobles and royals, and only after their debut would young lords and ladies be seen as full-fledged gentlemen and

noblewomen. One could only attend higher-echelon gatherings like parties after having had their debut.

“Chelsea, do you know what social debuts are in Chronowize?”

“One must attend a special debut party held by the royal family and receive a flower from Her Majesty the Queen,” I said, parroting what I’d heard from mother and grandmother during my convalescence. Both His Majesty and Lord Glen nodded.

“That party will be held a month from now, in which you’ll take part.”

“Understood.”

After I agreed to the king’s order, Lord Glen looked at me and smiled. “We’ll need to get a gown prepared for your debut, huh?”

“Can I not wear any of the dresses I brought back from the margraviate?”

“You need to wear a pure white gown for your debut.”

“Ah... All of my gowns are colorful...”

As Lord Glen and I spoke between ourselves, His Majesty sat up straight and cleared his throat.

“About that... Chelsea’s debut gown will be prepared by the royal family,” he said.

“And why is that?” Lord Glen said, gaze piercing the king. “Normally one’s debut gown would be prepared by their family. Since Chelsea lives far from her family, should I not be helping her prepare as her fiancé?”

His Majesty looked away as he replied, “The queen was saying that since Chelsea is your fiancée, she’s essentially family now... And since she’s family, helping her would be the obvious choice...”

“If Her Majesty said that, there’s no stopping her, huh...” Lord Glen sighed deeply, shoulders drooping.

The way both of them were acting made me wonder what sort of person the queen was. But before I could ask, His Majesty spoke again.

“Anyway, Chelsea’s social debut gown will be prepared under the queen’s

leadership,” he said, frowning apologetically. “You’ll receive an invitation for tea sometime soon. I apologize, Chelsea, but...prepare yourself.”

“What should I be prepared for?” I asked confusedly.

The king looked grim as he murmured, “After tea will be choosing a gown. For ladies, choosing a gown is akin to going to battle, and thus requires preparation... Or so the queen says.”

I went through a sudden growth spurt after my mana fever, and I had to get all-new dresses and gowns. Back then the room had been lined with outfits, and I had a tough time choosing between them. At this point in time, I thought that was what he was talking about. It wasn’t until the next day that I’d realize how wrong I was...

+ + +

Once all the talk about future events was finished, I returned to my room in the lodging house, and found Martha waiting for me.

“I’m home.”

“Welcome home, Lady Chelsea! I’ve been waiting for you!”

“Is something the matter?” I asked, only for Martha to grip both of my hands and smile brightly.

“Actually—Her Majesty the Queen has invited you for tea!”

I’d already been told as much by the king back in his office, so I nodded, unfazed.

“It’s an incredible honor as a noblewoman to be invited to tea by Her Majesty!”

Now that I think about it, I recall hearing mother say something like that as well.

“Her Majesty’s maids will come to collect you tomorrow after noon! Which means you must rest up tonight, and tomorrow morning—”

“I’ll be polished up again...” I said, interrupting her. She nodded back.

It was a bit depressing to think I’d have to go through the same thing two

days in a row. *But if it's necessary for me to stay with Lord Glen, I'll do my best!*

While I was pumping myself up, Martha murmured, "When you are invited to tea by Her Majesty, you must bring a gift. What should we send you with..."

"A gift... Would sweets be best?"

"Hmm... Once you become closer, you might gift a fashionable handkerchief or accessory, but bringing sweets would probably be safest for your first meeting."

"If that's the case, then why don't we ask Miss Micah to make something?" I asked.

"Miss Micah can make sweets too?!" Martha exclaimed in surprise. Since everything Miss Micah made the day before had been meals, it seemed she hadn't thought she could make sweets as well.

"I can make 'em~! Sugary sweets, salty sweets, spicy sweets—whatever sweets you want!" Miss Micah turned to us from where she'd been taking care of her tools in front of the tiny kitchen.

"Her Majesty is known for her love of sweets, so definitely sugary ones!" said Martha.

Miss Micah nodded, putting her tools away in her Item Box. "What kind of sweets should I make~?"

"How about apple pie?"

I seem to remember that being Martha's favorite treat...

"The kitchen here has no oven, so I can't do anything baked~"

Martha's shoulders drooped after the foxwoman said that. *But if we don't have an oven to use, then what other sweets can we make?*

As I pondered, Miss Micah clapped her hands and said, "Why don't we make the youkan you love, Chelsea~?"

"Would it be all right for it to be something I like?" I asked.

"Wonderful idea. You'll be able to confidently recommend a sweet you like yourself!" responded Martha.

“I’ve got all of the ingredients, so we can make it right now~!” said Miss Micah, checking inside her Item Box. “Why don’t you make it with me, Chelsea~?”

“Huh?” As I stood there in shock at the sudden suggestion, Martha walked towards my walk-in closet.

“If you make it with me, it’d be something you made yourself. I think that’d make Her Majesty happy~”

“I’ve never cooked before. I don’t know if I could do it...” Though I was nervous about doing something I’d never done before, I also wanted to try.

While I was worrying about what to do, Martha came back holding something.

“I thought something like this might happen, so I got one ready,” she said before spreading the object out to show me. “If you’re cooking, you’ll need an apron!” Then she quickly put it on me with a smile.

Now that I had an apron on, I felt like I’d be able to cook.

“All we need to do is mix it and let it harden, so it’ll be fine~ Will you cook with me~?” Miss Micah asked, looking at me expectantly as she wagged her tail.

With Martha’s encouragement and Miss Micah’s hopes... I felt brave enough to try.

“I’ll do my best to make it!” I said, gripping my hands into fists and getting smiles from both other women.



Then Miss Micah and I moved to stand in front of the kitchen.

“You need to use *Clean* on yourself before you do any cooking. This is absolutely necessary~!” she said.

Since I couldn’t cast it myself, she cast it for me.

“Now we can start cooking~! Our ingredients are water, agar-agar, sugar, and red bean paste. We’ll be using a single-handled pot and a metal mold~” Miss Micah explained, pulling the ingredients and tools out of her Item Box and lining them up on the counter. “Our first step is putting the water and agar-agar in the pot and heating it up~”

Following her instructions, I set the pot on the magical burner and put the water and agar-agar in. Lighting the burner was apparently dangerous if you weren’t used to doing it, so she did it for me. As we stared at the pot, it started bubbling.

“Once it starts boiling, we add the sugar. If you pour it in from too high, the hot water will splash~” Miss Micah told me, having me back away from the pot before she demonstrated. When she poured the sugar in from about three fists above the water, boiling water splashed all around. “Whenever you add anything, you need to add it from somewhere low~”

This time, she slowly added sugar closer to the water’s surface. The water rippled, but it didn’t splash.

While I stood there impressed, she handed me a small dish filled with sugar. “You try it now, Chelsea~”

Doing just as she said, I poured my dish of sugar in from a low height. After that, we let it boil again before lowering the heat and adding the red bean paste bit by bit, mixing it with a spatula to make sure it didn’t burn.

“And our youkan is finished~ Now we just need to pour it into the mold. Since it’s hot, Micah will do it for you~” Miss Micah said, pouring the youkan into a metal mold from the pan. “Once it cools down a bit, we just need to chill it in the fridge~”

After waiting until the metal mold was cool enough to touch, Miss Micah

opened the fridge door for me, and I carefully put the youkan-filled mold inside. Once the door clicked closed, I let out the breath I'd been holding.

"Good job, Chelsea~!"

"Thank you for teaching me, Miss Micah."

It was my first time ever cooking, but it was really fun.

"I'd like to try cooking again, if I ever get the chance..." I let slip.

"Of course~!" she replied with a great smile, tail wagging.

Nearby the foxwoman, Martha stood with her arms crossed, seemingly deep in thought. After a moment, she nodded to herself and said, "If Lady Chelsea will be cooking again, we'll have to get a great kitchen built for her!"

"I agree~"

"What features will we need?"

"A big sink, for sure~ For cooking beside each other, we'll need..."

After that, Miss Micah and Martha had a long talk about what to do with the kitchen.

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The next day, I got all polished up by my maids during the morning, just as planned. They also did my hair in a more sophisticated style than usual, and put me in the highest-quality dress I owned.

It almost seems like they're putting more effort in today... Thinking back, I could remember mother saying something about how a lady must put more effort into preparing to meet another lady than a man. They might have been making sure I wouldn't embarrass myself meeting the queen.

After noon had passed, one of the queen's maids came for me.

"Allow me to escort you." Having been assigned to the queen herself, the maid's greeting was both courteous and elegantly gestured.

She looks just like the lecturer who taught me manners. While I thought that, I carried the youkan I'd made the day before in a box and followed the maid, along with my personal guardian knights.

Leaving the Research Institute's lodging house, we headed to the north side of the citadel. I gazed over the Great Western Garden as we walked, coming to a stop at the entrance to the royal family's living quarters. There were a few knights wearing black military uniforms with blue capes on only one shoulder who looked over us. If I remembered correctly, knights wearing blue capes were part of the Royal Guard, specializing in protecting the royal family. Lord Glen said that they were elite knights who had both martial arts and Magic Skills.

The maid stopped before turning back to us. Looking at my guardian knights, she said, "Due to the barrier protecting the area, only those with permission will be able to enter. We will have your knights wait here."

The knights nodded at her words. They saluted before falling back.

The northern part of the citadel that housed the castle containing the royal family's living quarters was protected by an invisible barrier so that only royalty and those with permission could enter. Since I was given my own garden within the barrier when I was appointed a research fellow, I could go inside.

After giving my knights a slight bow, I followed the maid inside the barrier...stepping into the royal family's castle. Since it was my first time visiting them, I was just as excited as I was nervous.

A few steps later, some female members of the Royal Guard fell into step behind me. They were probably there as replacements for my guardian knights. I glanced back at them, getting slight nods and smiles back.

Inside the castle, there were many ornate sculptures and paintings catching my attention. After a bit more walking, I could see a courtyard with all sorts of colorful flowers. Beside the door leading to the courtyard stood a woman, who was wearing a black robe with a red stole. Since it was the same outfit that Lord Ishel from the Mage Order had worn, she must have been from the Mage Order too.

The maid stopped in front of the woman. "You will be appraised by this Mage Order Appraiser," she explained as the other woman looked at me closely.

"She is not carrying any poison, blades, or other dangerous items," the appraiser said after a moment, giving a strong nod.

The maid nodded back, opening the door to the courtyard with a smile and pointing towards the greenhouse within. “Her Majesty is waiting inside of that greenhouse. Please head there on your own.”

“Thank you very much for escorting me,” I replied before stepping outside.

I could smell all sorts of things from the colorful flowers around me. There were sweet ones and refreshing ones... I felt quite strange as I arrived at the greenhouse.

The door opened from inside, and a maid peeked out. “Are you the daughter of Margrave Sargent?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Please, do come inside.”

“Please excuse me.”

The inside of the greenhouse had just as many colorful flowers as the courtyard. In the middle of the flowers was a tea table with two chairs, with a beautiful woman already seated. The moment she saw me, she stood up gracefully and smiled.

“This must be the first time we’re meeting face-to-face. I am the Queen of the Kingdom of Chronowize, Fiolia.”

“It is an honor to meet you. I am Chelsea, daughter of Margrave Sargent.”

After I performed the curtsy I’d practiced so many times, Her Majesty’s smile deepened.

I mentioned that I’d brought a gift, which she immediately took and handed to her maid. Then she asked me to sit down.

“I am ever so grateful,” I said, being careful to speak like a lady. Once Her Majesty had sat down, I sat as well.

Everything I’d done so far were things I’d practiced during my convalescence, so I didn’t have any problems. From then on, I’d be talking to the queen. *I’ll have to be careful, not only about my manner of speech, but about the subjects I speak of as well...* As soon as I thought that, I got nervous.

While I sat there frozen, the maid brought the youkan over on a plate. I had brought it pre-cut, so there was just a single slice.

“Oh my... What is this?” the queen asked, looking confusedly at the slice that was a bit different in color from chocolate.

“This is a dessert called youkan. It is made with azuki beans, which can only be cultivated in a section of land within the Radzuel Empire.”

“So it’s a treat from the Radzuel Empire. I wonder how it tastes?” After Her Majesty said that, she cut a bite-sized piece off of the youkan and lifted it to her mouth.

I’d taste-tested it before I left, and even Miss Micah had said it tasted good, but... Whether or not Her Majesty liked it was a completely different matter. I watched carefully as she swallowed.

“I’m not sure how to explain it... It’s softer than sweet potato on the tongue, with a sophisticated sweetness. It’s very delicious!”

The queen seemed to love it, cutting off another bite-sized piece and raising it to her lips. I took a bite too, and then a sip of tea as my nervousness faded slightly.

After enjoying her youkan, Her Majesty took a sip of tea. With a smile on her face, she said, “Congratulations on your engagement. I’m so happy that Little Glen, who I consider a little brother, is finally engaged.”

It seemed she and Lord Glen were close enough for her to call him “Little Glen.” It made me feel a bit jealous.

“He’s always been so mature and obedient, even as a small child. It was so strange. But...” The queen paused, giggling. “I think it was around when he was six years old... There were talks of getting him a fiancée for a future political marriage. But Glen said, ‘I’ll do everything I can to make our country thrive, so please let me choose my own spouse.’”

Her Majesty lifted her fan from her lap to her mouth to hide her giggles.

“You’re the fiancée he picked for himself. Always remember that it absolutely wasn’t for political purposes,” she continued, still smiling.

“Yes. I won’t forget.” I nodded back, touching the engagement ring on my right ring finger.

After that, we chatted a bit before a maid approached the queen and whispered something in her ear.

“It seems things are ready,” Her Majesty said, beaming. “Do you know what kind of gown you’ll need to wear to your social debut, Chelsea?”

“I know that it will be a pure white one...” I said, repeating what Lord Glen had told me in the king’s office. “Debuting young lords and ladies must wear pure white party clothing. The clothing would be prepared by their families.”

Hearing my response, the queen’s smile deepened. “You’re Glen’s fiancée, which means you’re family. I’ll choose your gown for you. Now then, let’s get moving.”

“U-Understood.”

Sucked into Her Majesty’s momentum, I stood, left the greenhouse, and headed back inside the castle. Then the closest door to us opened, and I could see lots of white gowns and fabric lined up.

“We’ll choose a style from these gowns, and then we’ll decide what fabric to make it from!”

Farther in, I could see a maid with measuring tape, as well as a tailor.

It was only then that I noticed that the queen’s smile was the same one that my maids wore when they were prettying me up. That afternoon, I became Her Majesty the Queen’s dress-up doll...

+ + +

I tried on so many gowns, and compared all sorts of fabrics with different feels and materials... Just as I was completely exhausted at changing over and over again, I heard a scratching sound from somewhere. Looking towards the sound, I saw Ele in his cat form outside, scratching at the window.

What is he doing here? I thought.

While I was a bit confused, Her Majesty broke out into a smile. “Hello again, Mister Kitty! Have you gotten bigger? Let him in.”

One of the maids opened the window slightly, and Ele slipped in through the crack, before jumping down from the windowsill to the floor. The queen was so focused on him that she stopped pressing fabric against me.

«I came to check on you per the Storage Spirits' request, and you are exhausted!» Ele said as he walked over in front of the queen and I.

“Mister Kitty is meowing today!” Her Majesty said, handing the fabric in her hand to a maid.

When Ele was in his cat form, only those contracted to spirits and people with [Appraisal] could hear him. Apparently everyone else just heard meowing.

Her Majesty excitedly crouched down and reached towards Ele, who nimbly dodged her hands. “Oh, you’re always so unfriendly. But that’s cute too...!”

Ignoring the queen’s murmurs, Ele moved to my feet, reaching towards the hem of my skirt. Looking closely, I saw that his little claws were out in preparation to climb up my skirt. But the gown I was wearing right then wasn’t mine. *It’d be trouble if he ripped holes in it!* I rushed to pick him up in my arms instead.

“Oh my... You won’t let me touch you, but Chelsea is okay? You’re such a sensitive boy,” cried Her Majesty.

Ele jumped from my arms to my shoulder to sit.

“How adorable! Chelsea is your favorite, huh? But we can’t choose a dress with you like that. Oh well. Let’s take a little break,” she said with a smile.

I can rest for a bit! The moment I thought that, my shoulders sagged. It seemed I’d been tensed up the entire time.

I sat down and took a breather as Ele spoke to me from his perch on my shoulder. «The Storage Spirits were worried about you. They could feel your exhaustion through the bracelet, and pleaded for me to come help.»

“So that’s what you’re doing here,” I whispered back quietly, getting a nod. I’d have to thank both Ele and the Storage Spirits later.

Thanks to Cat Ele’s presence, our little break turned into a long one before we started up our gown-choosing again. After I tried on a few more gowns, I found

a dress I loved.

“This one is adorable,” I murmured.

“Then that’s the gown we’ll go with.” Her Majesty smiled gently. “We’ll have it made with some slightly glossy fabric with embroidery.”

“All right,” I replied with a nod, finally putting an end to the event.

I didn’t realize it would be so much trouble... I now understood what His Majesty had meant by saying that picking a gown was akin to a battle that I must be prepared for. *I’ll have to pump myself up and be a bit more ready next time!*

+ + +

The day after my gown-choosing ordeal, I was given a day off thanks to my exhaustion. Following lunch, I sat on my sofa and had a nice cup of tea.

I didn’t see Lord Glen yesterday...

During our ten-day journey back to the capital from the Sargent Margraviate, I’d spent every day with him. Since most of our time was spent in the carriage, rest areas, or various inns, we didn’t get to explore any towns, but we were able to talk a lot. I’d only not seen him one single day since my return, but I missed him so much. *I wish I could see him...* I thought.

I touched the engagement ring on my right ring finger as I sighed softly. While I was thinking of what to do, a knock came from the door.

Gina headed over to greet the guest. I couldn’t tell who it was from where I sat. *I wonder who it is?* I wondered, looking towards the door as Gina came back.

“His Highness has come to see you. What will we do?”

“Lord Glen?!” I jumped to my feet, only to get a giggle from Gina.

I was so happy I forgot I needed to look and sound like a proper lady... I quickly corrected my posture and checked to make sure my hair and dress weren’t messed up.

“Please welcome him inside,” I ordered.

Led inside by the maid, Lord Glen wouldn't look me in the eye for some reason. "I'm sorry for coming to see you unannounced," he apologized as soon as he reached the sofa.

It was a bit sudden, but I was ecstatic since I was just thinking of how I wanted to see him. "Oh, no, I'm happy that you've come to visit," I told him honestly.

When he heard that, a great smile bloomed on his face.

I don't know why, but...he's so cute today! Hiding my surprise, I urged him to sit down. After having Gina make us a pot of tea, she fell back to wait by the wall.

Sitting across from him with the coffee table between us, I could see Lord Glen's face well. His deep blue hair sparkled like the night, while his blue eyes sucked you right in. He was as beautiful as an angel. No matter how many times I saw him, I couldn't take my eyes off him.

As I stared, he hid his face behind his hand. "Um, having my beloved fiancée look at me for so long is kinda...embarrassing..." Looking a bit closer, I could see his cheeks were red.

"Please excuse my rudeness," I said, tearing my eyes off of him to look at my tea. *Did he just say "beloved fiancée"...*? I blushed too as I realized.

As the two of us sat embarrassed, Gina cleared her throat from her spot by the wall.

Oh, that's right. We're not alone like we were in the carriage! I straightened my posture and looked back over to Lord Glen, only to see him smiling his usual smile, albeit with red ears. *I need to calm down too...*

After taking a deep breath, I asked, "What is the reason for your visit today?"

"I was wondering how your tea party with Her Majesty went," he said, tilting his head slightly. "Would you tell me all about it?"

"Of course," I replied, before recounting what had happened the day before. Our tea party in the greenhouse, being taken to another room to choose my gown, Ele coming to make us take a break... Lord Glen nodded along as I spoke, listening until the end. "I'll have to prepare myself even more next time, just as

His Majesty said.”

When I finished, he smiled softly. “Sounds rough. What gown did you end up choosing?”

“That will be my little secret until the day of the party,” I answered, raising my index finger to my lips as he blinked in confusion. “Her Majesty told me that keeping it a secret until it’s time would be more fun.”

And true to her suggestion, seeing Lord Glen make an expression I didn’t see often was actually a bit fun.

“...Her Majesty told you that, huh? Nothing I can do then,” he said with a wry smile. “Did she say anything about choosing your gown for our engagement announcement?”

“No, she did not.”

Lord Glen’s eyes sparkled when he heard that. “Then would you let me choose your gown for the announcement?”

“Of course,” I said with an instant nod, getting a happy smile in return.

“It’s a promise, then.”

We linked our fingers together in a promise to each other.

2. My Social Debut

My thirteenth birthday came along. Had it been my twelfth—when I awakened to my Skill, or my fifteenth—when I would become an adult, there would have been a grand celebration. But any other birthdays were usually just celebrated with family. Since Brother Marx happened to be out on a monster extermination mission near the border, Lord Glen celebrated with me instead, as my future family.

The gift he presented me was a wide ribbon. “I thought you’d be more likely to use something you could wear every day.”

“Thank you so very much...!”

I was so happy that my birthday was being celebrated for the first time in my life—and that I’d even been given a present—I couldn’t help but smile. But for some reason, Lord Glen blushed and covered his mouth with his hand after I did.

Half a month later, the day of my social debut arrived.

For the few days leading up to it, I had been given multiple massages with perfumed oil, and had it worked into my hair as well. Thanks to that, my light pink hair was shiny and smooth, and my skin was soft.

Because the royally hosted social debut party began at dusk, preparations began after lunch. My maids shined me up even more and dressed me in the gown that I’d chosen with Her Majesty. Since I would be putting the flower she would give me in my hair, I didn’t wear any other hair accessories. To finish me up, they did my makeup lightly.

“You look wonderful.”

“This is the wonderful moment where you change from a girl to a woman, Lady Chelsea!”

“It looks super great. You’re so cute~!”

Having Gina, Martha, and Miss Micah praise me like that made my cheeks heat up.

“Take a look in the mirror~”

Urged on by Miss Micah, I stood in front of the mirror. The gown I’d chosen with the queen was a simple A-line design, but the top was decorated with lace, with the embroidery increasing as it got closer to the hem. Both the lace and the embroidery were made from shiny, pure-white thread, which appeared to sparkle based on the angle you looked at them. And with the light makeup on my face, I could scarcely recognize myself in the mirror.

Once the sun started to set outside, a knock rang out through my room. It was none other than Brother Marx in his evening party clothes. Marx was the second son of Margrave Sargent, and deputy commander of the Second Order of Knights. Though he had a fiancée who was also a member of the Second Order of Knights, she was currently heading up the security today, and was thus not available.

“You look great in anything, Chelsea,” he said, giving me his signature smile.

On the occasion of one’s social debut, they would take either their fiancé or a family member along as their partner. Though Lord Glen would normally be the one to accompany me now, our engagement hadn’t been announced yet, so I asked Brother Marx instead.

“Thank you ever so much.” Since I was going out to a social venue, I was even more careful than usual to speak like a lady.

“Let’s get going, then.”

“All right. Thank you so very much for accompanying me.”

I lightly rested my right hand on his left arm before we headed out of the Research Institute’s lodging house.

“Since we’re dressed up today, let’s go the indoor route.”

“Where is this indoor route?” I asked, tilting my head, but Marx only answered with a smile.

The only route I knew of to get to the party venue from the lodging house was

walking outside along the south wall of the building. But Marx walked towards the institute itself after we left the lodging house. When we stepped inside, there was a member of the Second Order standing guard.

“As you see, today’s my little sister’s social debut, so we’re going through here.”

“Yes!” replied the knight, bowing his head slightly towards us. “Have a wonderful time,” he whispered as I passed, giving me the usual smile.

As we walked farther inside the building, we came to a stop in front of a double door at the farthest point. *I’ve never been here before...* After shooting me a smile, Brother Marx opened the door. On the other side was another knight standing guard. Marx explained where we were going again before we continued down the hall. Soon I could see the Great Western Garden through the windows to the north.

“The Royal Research Institute is connected to the castle.”

Which meant that we were inside the castle now.

“I had no idea,” I said in surprise as Marx smiled like a child who’d succeeded in pranking someone.

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Led by Brother Marx, we reached the doors to the hall. There was a receptionist at the entrance who we told that I would be debuting that day.

When attending social debut parties hosted by the royal family, it was custom to send word of your attendance beforehand, even for those who weren’t debuting themselves.

“Lady Chelsea and Sir Marxfort, children of Margrave Sargent, yes?”

Both Brother Marx and I nodded at the man’s question.

“Both of your names are on the attendance list. Now that you have been confirmed, please enter.”

After nodding at the receptionist again, both Brother Marx and I headed towards the party hall. As soon as we walked to the entrance, I got nervous. In front of us were many nobles. And not only that, but they all looked gorgeous

with their party clothing. I unintentionally squeezed the hand on Marx's arm a little bit.

"Getting nervous? Take a deep breath. Mother taught you that, right?"

Mother had indeed taught me that. After nodding, I took a few slow, deep breaths that no one would notice. I managed to calm down a little... *Okay, let's go!*

When I squeezed my hand again, he gave me a smile.

Looking around the venue once more, the nobles were not only gorgeous, but so was their surroundings. There was a huge, sparkling chandelier hanging from the ceiling, and the metal fixtures on things like the doors and pillars were polished to a shine. And inside the hall were young lords and ladies dressed up in pure white party clothing, just like me. Some were my age, some seemed a year or two older, and all of them looked just as nervous as I was.

After we walked further inside to wait for both the king and queen to arrive, someone spoke to me.

"If it isn't Miss Chelsea!"

The one to speak was Duke Bazrack, younger brother of the former king. I had once made a seed with [Seed Creation] that saved his granddaughter's life. It was thanks to that encounter that I'd become a research fellow for the country.

Letting go of Brother Marx's arm, I curtsied towards Duke Bazrack. "It has been so long, Your Excellency."

"You've grown much taller since our last meeting. At first glance, I wasn't sure whether you were the same Miss Chelsea—the same research fellow—that saved my granddaughter. But I spoke up after I recognized your light pink hair and purple eyes and was sure," the duke said, smiling. "So tonight is your debut. Congratulations."

Seeing his smile I thought, *His smile is the same as His Majesty's. They really are both members of the royal family.*

"Thank you very much," I replied.

As we spoke, I could feel the gazes on us. I glanced around without moving

my head, only to see people watching us with interest.

Still smiling, Duke Bazrack nodded along. “Well then, I’ll be back to see you if anything comes up,” he said before leaving.

As I placed my hand back on Marx’s arm, my brother whispered in my ear. “It seems Duke Bazrack will protect you.”

When I looked up at him in confusion, he quietly explained things further.

The fact that the person who saved the duke’s granddaughter’s life had become a research fellow was well-known within the nobility. But since I hadn’t debuted yet, only the nobles who worked within the Research Institute had ever seen me. Because of that, no one had realized who I was when I entered. Being unknown and unnoticed might have invited scorn, so Duke Bazrack specifically spoke to me and referred to me as the research fellow who saved his granddaughter in order to avoid this.

“Showing people that you’ve got the support of a ducal family will protect you.”

So that’s what he meant...! I felt thankful to have so many different people protecting me.

After a little wait, His Majesty the King and Her Majesty the Queen entered through a door to the deep right. The both of them stood about five steps above the rest of the hall and looked around. That was enough to make everyone go silent.

“You’ve all done well to attend. Enjoy yourselves.”

And with the king’s words, the royally hosted social debut party began. The orchestra waiting along the left innermost wall began playing. Maids set out a flower basket with flowers in all sorts of colors on a table beside Her Majesty. Seeing that, the prime minister moved to the king’s side and unrolled the scroll he’d been holding.

“We will now read off the names of those to debut tonight. When your name is called, please come to see His Majesty and Her Majesty,” the prime minister announced before he began rattling off names.

The first one called was the son of a baron. The order in which we'd be called started from the person of lowest birth. Though I was the adopted daughter of a margrave, which was equal in rank to a marquis, I was also on the level of the royal family thanks to my status as a research fellow, which meant that I'd be called last.

After I waited, heart pounding, my name was finally called. I let go of Brother Marx's arm and headed to the royal couple alone. *Slow and steady so that my posture looks elegant...* I walked just as my mother had told me. I did my best not to look around, since it would've made me even more nervous.

After ascending the stairs and arriving before the king and queen, I curtsied before them. His Majesty smirked, while Her Majesty smiled.

"May your future be full of happiness," the queen said, taking a noticeably bigger white lily—a Casablanca—from the flower basket and handing it to me. Taking it with both hands, I bowed my head. When I raised it back up, she spoke quietly so that no one would hear. "Your dress looks lovely."

Happy, I smiled back at her.

After I walked back down the stairs towards Brother Marx, I saw that he was with Lord Glen. The two of them had worked together a number of times before, and were quite friendly. On my way over to the two, I saw Lord Glen lightly whack my brother on the shoulder as they chatted away happily.

"Welcome back, Chelsea."

"I've returned, brother. Good evening to you, Your Highness," I said, keeping my speech ladylike since we were in public.

"Congratulations on your debut. You look beautiful," complimented Lord Glen with his usual soft smile after looking at me as if dazzled.

I had to hold myself back from jumping for joy when he said that.

"Thank you ever so much." I was blushing, but I was pretty sure I thanked him like a proper lady.

"Good timing. Why don't we let His Highness put your flower in your hair?" Brother Marx suggested, looking towards the casablanca I held.

Young lords would put the flowers that the queen gave them on their chests, while young ladies would put them in their hair. Normally, Brother Marx would be the one to do it as my partner, but...

“Ah, wonderful idea,” said Lord Glen, holding his hand out towards me.

Though I’d been thinking that I would be happier if Lord Glen was the one to put the flower in my hair, I wasn’t sure if it was all right for someone other than my partner to do it. I glanced over at Marx, only to get a nod and a smile back.

Deciding it must be okay, I gently placed the casablanca on Lord Glen’s outstretched hand. “Please do.”

Giving me a happy smile, Lord Glen leaned towards me. I closed my eyes out of surprise at the sudden lack of distance between us, and I heard something like a gasp from him before I felt something be pushed into my hair.

“It’s in,” he said, prompting me to open my eyes. I touched the spot he’d put the flower with my right hand. “No wonder Her Majesty chose that. It looks great on you.”

“Thank you...ever so much?”

Just as I was thanking him, I saw a young lady I’d never seen before acting strange behind him. The girl, with her fluffy and wavy honey-colored hair and azure eyes, was peeking out at me from behind Lord Glen’s back, and whenever our eyes met, she’d instantly shrink back into hiding. Not just once, but a few times. She was wearing a scarlet-colored gown, so she must not have been one of the debutantes.

While I stood there confused, someone spoke from behind me. “Congrats on your debut, Miss Chelsea! Your dress looks great!”

Looking back, I saw Lord Tris waving to me, dressed in his evening finery.

“Thank you ever so much, Lord Tris,” I thanked him, only for him to look just as confused as I was.

“So what’s with Miss Noel acting all weird behind His Highness?”

It seemed the girl’s name was Lady Noel. From the way Lord Tris spoke, he seemed to know her, but... When I looked back to her, she hid behind Lord Glen

again, who heaved a heavy sigh before turning to look at her.

“I’d been pretending I didn’t notice, but... What are you doing, Miss Noel?”

“No, I, er, I mean...”

“If you’ve got anything to say, just come right out and say it,” Lord Glen said. From the way he spoke, he must have known her as well.

Lady Noel dodged him, facing me with her entire body. When our eyes met, she smiled brightly.

“Then I’ll just say it!” After walking a few steps towards me, she held her right hand out. “I’ve fallen for you at first sight! Please be my friend!”

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Having become the center of attention thanks to Lady Noel’s loud exclamation, we moved from the hall out to the gardens.

“You’ve never met Chelsea before, Miss Noel. You should introduce yourself first,” chided Lord Glen strictly from where he stood beside me.

“Th-That’s true! Please excuse my rudeness!” Lady Noel quickly straightened herself up, giving me a ladylike smile. “My name is Noel, daughter of Marquis Wisteria. I am pleased to make your acquaintance.”

“I am Chelsea, daughter of Margrave Sargent. I am a researcher at the Royal Research Institute.”

When I introduced myself in return, Lady Noel clutched her hands in front of her chest. “Oh, Lady Chelsea, you’re even cuter up close! Too cute! Please, be my friend!”

“U-Um...”

Seeing as this was my first time having anyone react to me like that, I had no idea how to respond. I took a step back from her overflowing vigor, and accidentally bumped into Marx behind me.

“Could you please stop scaring my little sister?” he said, hiding me behind him. He was smiling, but it didn’t reach his eyes. He might have been a little mad.

“Scaring her? Perish the thought! I just want to worship her adorableness and —”

“Just stop right there, Miss Noel.” Lord Tris spoke up before she could finish what she was saying, putting himself between us. “You’re always so abrupt!” he continued, starting up a lecture.

Brother Marx, Lord Glen, and I took a few steps back and watched.

“Err, this might seem a tad rude, but is Lady Noel always like this?” I asked Lord Glen, since he seemed to know her.

“She passes as a normal noble lady if she keeps her mouth shut, but...” With a wry smile, he began to tell me all about her.

Miss Noel was the only daughter of Marquis Wisteria, who awakened to the rare Skill [Special Appraisal] on her twelfth birthday and spent a year in special training for it. When she came to the Royal Research Institute for her training, she met Lord Glen.

“Her father is a marquis, just like Tris’s, so they’ve known each other since they were little. She’s also fifteen years old, same as his little sister, so he’s always been the one to lecture her whenever she goes wild.”

“That...seems like a difficult job,” I replied, getting another wry smile from Lord Glen.

Seemingly finished with his lecture, Lord Tris and Lady Noel came back over to us.

“Apologize, okay?”

Urged on by Lord Tris, Lady Noel stepped forward, shoulders hanging piteously. “I’m sorry, Lady Chelsea. I didn’t realize that my suddenness shocked you,” she apologized, lowering her head. “I’ll watch out for that from now on, so please, be my friend!”

“All right. Please treat me well.”

Since she apologized so honestly, she probably isn’t a bad person. Thinking that, I nodded back to her.

“Yay! We’re friends now! Come to play at my house sometime!” Lady Noel

cried, bouncing in place happily before using that momentum to run back to the party hall.

“...She was abrupt to the end,” I murmured, getting an awkward smile from Lord Glen as Lord Tris covered his face with a hand and Marx sighed.

3. A Lunch Date with Noel

The next day, I received a formal invitation to a luncheon meeting at Marquis Wisteria's villa in the capital.

"Marquis Wisteria's family is just as old as the Forium family, and was where Chronowize's princess of two generations ago married into," explained Gina as she unfolded the invitation.

Because of the princess's marriage, the security around the Wisteria family was strengthened. On top of that, they apparently had a large botanical garden due to Her Majesty's hobbies.

"Also, thanks to catering to Her Majesty's selective palate, the food at the Wisteria Manor is delicious!" Martha said, wrapping the explanation up.

A huge botanical garden, and delicious food... I actually might want to go...

"If it's in a week, it'll overlap with Chelsea's kitchen renovation too~"

"Ah, that's right! The renovation will be loud, so if you'd like, going out that day may be a great idea, Lady Chelsea," murmured Martha in response to Miss Micah's comment.

If it was the same time as my kitchen renovation, then it would be better for me to be outside of my room so I don't get in the way. *I could just spend the day in my lab at the Research Institute, but since Lady Noel invited me...*

"I'd like to accept the invitation," I told the three after thinking a bit. They all smiled, so I probably didn't make the wrong choice.

"Well then, let's write up a letter in response later."

I nodded at Gina's suggestion.

"If Lady Chelsea is accepting, then we'll have to decide who will be accompanying her."

For young lords and ladies who were still minors, they needed to either bring a family member of the same gender or an adult maid or butler along when

visiting other nobles' manors. Though Brother Marx was family, he wouldn't be able to come because of his gender, which meant I'd need to take one of my personal maids.

"On renovation day, Gina will need to supervise as head maid, and Micah should be there too, since she'll be the one using the kitchen the most. Which means...I'll go!" said Martha, raising her hand.

"I figured it'd be you~" muttered Miss Micah with a strained smile.

And so, it was decided that Martha would accompany me that day.

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A week later, I was polished up all nice in the morning (as always) and dressed in a frilly dress. When we left the lodging house after I was finished, there was a carriage bearing Marquis Wisteria's crest stopped nearby.

"They've sent a carriage to fetch you, just as the invitation stated they would," said Gina, getting a nod back from me.

"The renovation should be done after noon~" Miss Micah told me, tail wagging. "I'll be making your dinner in your brand new kitchen~!"

"I'm looking forward to it," I replied with a smile, with both Miss Micah and Gina giving me bright smiles in response.

Martha and I climbed into the carriage. Peeking my head out the little window, I said, "We'll be leaving now."

The carriage drove through the southern gate of the citadel towards the nobles quarter, before passing through a huge gate surrounded with especially tall walls. Once we were through, we were surrounded by trees, making it seem as if we'd entered a forest.

After following the road for a while, I saw a big manor. The carriage stopped in front of the entrance, and both Martha and I disembarked.

"Welcome, and thank you for coming, milady." The first person to greet us was a butler with graying blue hair.

"Lady Noel will be with you shortly," said the maid standing behind him, just before Lady Noel ran towards us.

“L-Lady Chelsea! Thank you so much for coming!” she cried, out of breath, but still smiling brightly. The memory of mother telling me that a lady should never run in front of other people flashed through my mind, but I decided not to worry about it, since not all ladies were the same.

“Thank you so much for inviting me today.” I greeted her as elegantly as I could. Since I was invited as a friend, I dropped my tone from ladylike to just polite.

With a great smile, Lady Noel pointed towards the garden. “It’s not time for lunch yet, so I’ll give you a tour of our pride and joy, the gardens!”

Before I could even respond, she grabbed my right hand and started walking. *I didn’t think we’d be walking hand in hand so suddenly...!* Despite my shock, I let her take me away. Martha, as my chaperone, fell into step a few strides behind us.



As we walked from the entrance down a stone pathway along the villa's walls, the smell of herbs gradually intensified. When we turned by the corner of the building, I could see a huge garden and a big greenhouse.

"These are my family's wonderful gardens!" Lady Noel told me, spreading her right arm wide.

There were shockingly few flowers in the Wisteria Botanical Gardens.

"Most of the plants great-grandmother gathered for her hobby aren't flowers!" she told me, looking happily at the plants around us. She must have some good memories of them.

"There are a lot of herbs," I commented as I looked at one corner of the garden. There were many edible plants that I'd seen before in my plant guide.

Lady Noel gave me a big smile. "Yep! From the edge, there's mint, basil, thyme, rosemary, fennel..." she said, naming them all off. "Other people our age look at our gardens and just think it's a bunch of grass... But I knew you'd know better! I'm so glad!"

I'll keep the fact that I remembered edible herbs that could be used in cooking, and especially for tea, a secret...

As I looked around the gardens while we walked towards the greenhouse, I saw a plant I didn't know. Letting go of Lady Noel's hand, I moved closer to the unknown plant.

"What's this one?" My skirt moved, and the hem touched what looked like the seeds. As it did, they stuck right to it. "Huh?!"

While I was shocked, I could hear Lady Noel holding back her laughter beside me. "That plant has a proper name, but great-grandmother called it 'stickybug.'"

"Why is it called a bug when it's a plant?" I asked while Martha rescued my skirt from the seeds.

"I asked her loads of times, but she just told me that was what it was called. She would never tell me why."

I held the stickybug that Martha had pulled off in my palm. The outside of the

seed was spiky, so I could tell it was easy for it to stick to clothing.

“Stickybugs don’t only cling to clothing, but animal fur too. Great-Grandmother said it grew that way to hitch a ride to other areas,” Lady Noel explained, telling me about different varieties.

If I made one part of the outer shell of an Aopo Seed like a stickybug so it would stick to fabric, it might be handy for carrying them around. You might even be able to hide them under your clothes... I kept thinking about things like that while she told me about the seeds.

“Let’s go to the greenhouse!” Lady Noel said, grabbing my right hand again and walking towards it.

The greenhouse was one or two times the size of the one in the citadel, and I could feel it was more humid than outside as we entered.

“There are some slightly dangerous plants inside the greenhouse, so please don’t touch them!” she told me, still smiling.

Dangerous plants?! I quickly nodded a few times in response. My hand tightened around hers naturally.

“Everything will be fine as long as you don’t touch them! So be very, very careful!” Lady Noel said, looking off into the distance.

“...Have you touched them before?” I asked, looking her in the face.

She smiled wryly, scratching her cheek. “When I was little, I touched them since I didn’t know which ones they were. I ended up with hives,” she confessed, shoulders drooping sadly. “It’d be terrible if it happened to you, so *please*, don’t touch them!”

“All right.”

She looked relieved when I nodded back. It was fun being with her, with all of her changing expressions. When I thought that, I naturally started smiling too.

There were a lot of stranger plants inside the greenhouse than out in the gardens.

“The plants around here are called carnivorous plants, and they eat bugs,” Lady Noel explained, telling me about the long pitcher plants—true to their

name, and Venus flytraps with their little teeth-like spikes on the edges of the leaves.

They would lure bugs in with their sweet scents before closing, or trap the bugs in between their leaves. I'd thought that plants couldn't move, but it seemed I was wrong.

Maybe I could make the plants I made with my [Seed Creation] Skill able to move too. If I make seeds for pitcher plants or Venus flytraps that grow bigger than normal, maybe they could be planted near where monsters appeared, to catch them easily...! But since there's a chance they might accidentally catch people too, I'd have to make sure to wish for them to follow my commands.

Once her explanation was over, we moved again.

"The plants here are medicinal ones with various effects, but great-grandmother told me they should only be touched by people who have studied them."

I nodded. My guide had medicinal plants in it too, and said that they could be used as either medicine or poison based on how they were used. Using a little bit of some might work as a painkiller, but a lot of it might just kill you instead.

It might be a good idea to make seeds for a plant that would work as a painkiller regardless of the amount used... For some reason, I was having lots of ideas for new seeds while I was here. It might have been easier to think them up after seeing plants in person rather than in a book.

The next section Lady Noel showed me to was a corner with peculiarly shaped, spiky plants. Since I'd never seen them before, I ended up staring for a bit.

One was round and about the size of my palm. Another was as thick around as my palm, but tall enough to nearly reach the ceiling. There was also one that was super thick, with leaves bigger than my head sprouting out in irregular patterns. They were all so strange...

"These are called 'cacti,' and they grow in deserts. My great-grandmother's favorite was this one, called the 'Queen of the Night,'" Lady Noel told me, pointing to one with long, thin leaves growing out of it.

The shape was just as peculiar as the other ones. *What makes it Her Majesty's favorite?* I thought as I tilted my head in confusion.

Lady Noel smiled. "It looks just like a normal plant, doesn't it? But it blooms beautifully, and only at night. It blooms every year, but no matter how many times I see it, it's still beautiful, and it smells great too," she explained, looking spellbound as she reminisced.

Just around when I was starting to really feel the humid heat of the greenhouse, I heard someone enter. When I turned towards the door, a Wisteria family maid was walking towards us.

When she reached Lady Noel, she bowed towards me. "Lunch has been prepared, so please head to the terrace."

"Let's go!"

"Okay." I nodded and we walked off, still hand in hand.

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There were seats prepared for us on the villa's terrace. There were also all sorts of potted plants. They must have been from Lady Noel's great-grandmother's hobby too.

"This place gets the best sun in the manor. Great-Grandmother loved this terrace, and was always lounging on the sofa and looking over her gardens," she explained, smiling happily again.

After that, I was urged to my chair, sitting across from Lady Noel. On top of the table was fluffy white bread and a small salad.

A maid entered, pushing a cart. On it were plates with green pasta and bowls of warm-looking soup full of vegetables.

"This is the Wisteria family's special basil carbonara! Let's eat while it's still warm!" said Lady Noel after it was placed on the table.

After saying my prayers to the earth gods, we began eating. There was lots of cheese used in the basil-flavored carbonara, and it was delicious. *I wonder if I could get Miss Micah to make this?* It was just *that* delicious!

"My great-grandmother thought this dish up! And, of course, the basil used..."

“...Is from your garden?”

“Yep!”

We chatted as we ate, and...I ended up full. I could eat a lot more than I used to be able to, but the amount of food on the table was more than double what I usually ate.

I can't finish it. I'm gonna end up leaving it...

While I was fretting about potential leftovers, my chaperone Martha whispered to me from her position diagonally behind me. “You can leave it. Nobles in the capital often serve more food than can be eaten.”

Mother hadn't taught me that, so I nodded and left over half of the food on my plate. Looking closely, Lady Noel left food on hers as well.

When I placed my fork and spoon together on my plate, the maid judged that we were finished and collected the plates left on the table onto the cart. Once she was finished, another maid came pushing another cart. On top of that was warm tea, and chocolate cake for dessert.

I didn't think we'd be having dessert! I love chocolate cake, so I really want to eat it if I can...!

While I was thinking that, Lady Noel started giggling from her spot sitting in front of me. “Shock, sadness... Your expression is always changing, Lady Chelsea. We've got lots of time, so we can eat dessert slowly!”

So everything I was thinking showed on my face... How embarrassing. I blushed, quietly agreeing.

After we took our time enjoying the cake and tea, we headed to Lady Noel's room. Since it would be my first time visiting someone else's room, my heart was pounding even more than whenever I felt excited. On our way, she still held my hand tight. It was somehow really embarrassing.

Climbing the staircase right in front of the entrance, Lady Noel stopped in front of the first wooden door we saw. “This is my room!” she announced, opening the door.

The first thing I saw were all of the houseplants everywhere. Not only were

they in the corners of the room and beside the sofa, but they were also on top of chests, her desk, everywhere possible. My room back at the Sargent Margraviate—my late mother’s room—was really cute. The huge difference between them shocked me.

“Lady Noel, your room is like a garden in itself,” I murmured, looking around.

“Thanks to my great-grandmother’s influence, I’ve loved plants since I was little. Before I knew it, I’d even started decorating my own room with them, leading to this,” she said bashfully, gently caressing a leaf on a big plant beside the sofa. I could tell that she really loved them.

“I’m sorry for making you stand like this. Let’s sit on the sofa and chat,” she said, pulling me by the hand before we sat side by side. Martha stood by the wall, watching us with a tender look in her eyes.

“My mother died when I was little...” Lady Noel started, staring off into the distance. “I was raised by my great-grandmother. Everyone says she was selfish—but to me, she was kind, yet strict. I respect her deeply.”

I nodded along.

“When I became an adult though, she departed.”

Lady Noel was fifteen...so she had just become an adult. *Does that mean her great-grandmother passed away recently...?* When the old gardener who took care of me passed away, I was really sad.

I sat there solemnly, but then Lady Noel pouted. “She comes home with souvenirs sometimes, but it always seems like she’s having so much fun that she forgot about me!”

So she really just went on a journey?! I’m so glad I didn’t give my condolences...

“What’s your family like, Lady Chelsea?”

When she asked that, my days at the Eucharis Manor flashed through my mind. I gave my head a little shake before smiling and answering, “I was born to a baron, but my mother died giving birth to me...”

“Just the same as me, huh?”

I nodded. “A lot of things happened, and I was adopted by Margrave Sargent, my birth mother’s older brother.”

“So your new mother is also your aunt!”

“Yes. I call her mother now. She’s gentle and strict, just like your great-grandmother.”

During my six months of recuperation, my new adopted mother taught me lots of things so I’d be a lady worthy of Lord Glen. She was strict about manners, but she’d praise me when I did my assignments properly.

“She must be a great mother! I can tell from the look on your face!”

“Yes, I really look up to her.” My thoughts were apparently still showing on my face, but I nodded anyway.

After that, we started talking about our favorite sweets.

“I love flan. Jiggly, soft flan, slightly harder flan, charred flan, flan with slightly bitter caramel, they’re all so delicious...!” When I started getting heavy into talking about flan, Martha was covering her mouth, trying to stop herself from giggling from her spot by the wall. “What do you like, Lady Noel?”

“I like cheesecake!”

Before Lady Noel could elaborate any further, we heard the loud noise of something being smashed, and a man’s scream.

“Father?!”

It seemed that the scream came from Marquis Wisteria. Lady Noel shot to her feet, throwing open the door and running out into the hall before I could stop her. I heard lots of different sets of footsteps at the same time. Lady Noel immediately backtracked, closing the door again. She then ran over to the sofa where I was sitting in a panic.

“Wh-What should we do?! A lot of people I don’t know just came out of father’s room...”

The door opened again before she could even finish, and a thin man in black walked inside. I could see a few other people in black running through the hallway.

Martha quickly leapt up, standing in front of Lady Noel and me. Her maids, on the other hand, were shaking, paralyzed in fear.

“Looks like we’ve got some good hostages here.” The thin man in black’s deep voice echoed through the room. In response, two other men in black entered the room from the hallway.

The first one in, a plump man, looked around before his eyes locked on me. “Isn’t that girl the one that Our Lady, the Proxy spoke of?” he asked the tall man beside him.

I remember hearing of the Proxy back when I was in the Radzuel Empire.

“Pink hair and purple eyes... Yep, it’s her.” The plump man nodded as a smirk appeared on the tall man’s lips.

“How lucky are we?! Our Lady will be thrilled if we can kill the girl!”

Hearing the man’s exclamation, all of the men started closing in on me.

“N-No!” screamed Martha.

“Stay outta this!” cried the tall man, shoving her away with a single arm.

The hit sent her flying off to a corner of the room, twisting in pain. I’d experienced the same pain a number of times back at the barony, so I knew how bad it hurt. But in spite of it, Martha still glared at the men in black.

“We’ve only got business with this one,” said the tall man, drawing the sword from his hip as he moved in front of me with a smirk. Then he lifted the sword and slashed downwards at me.

I couldn’t make a sound, let alone move. I just closed my eyes tightly. I heard the sound of metal hitting something, but no pain. When I opened my eyes, the man’s sword had been knocked away by something before it reached me.

“Huh?! What the hell is this?!”

He tried slashing at me a few more times, but I was still unharmed. Then I realized the ring on my right ring finger was warm.

That’s right! The engagement ring Lord Glen gave me automatically casts defensive magic!

Realizing that he couldn't hurt me, the man reached out towards me, but he was knocked away before he could touch me.

"Dammit, what the hell is with this?!" the tall man screeched in irritation.

The plump man spoke next. "If you can't hurt her, leave her for later. We'll take the other girls as hostages."

The thin man, who had only been watching for what the plump man would do, began tying Martha—who'd been thrown to the wall; Lady Noel's maids—who were still petrified in place; and Lady Noel herself—who was shaking in fear in front of the couch, all up with rope.

"If you don't want them to get hurt, stay put here like a good girl," he warned.

All I could do was nod.

Interlude 1: Glen and Ele

Glenarnold Snowflake, younger brother of the King of Chronowize, was giving a noble advice about managing his territory inside of his personal office in the castle.

He hid his status as a [Reincarnator] from the public. But thanks to his knowledge and experience from his past life, he'd been giving advice to the people around him since he was young. Thanks to that, he was now regarded as an advisor for nobles.

"Thank you so very much!" said the noble who had come for advice, leaving the office with a relieved look.

Just before the door closed, a silver-furred cat slipped inside. Since the noble had just left, Glen and the cat were the only ones in the room.

"It's rare for you to come here..." he commented in confusion to the cat—the temporary form of Ele, King of the Spirits.

Ele floated up into the air and onto the lower sofa for guests. Then, after a breath, he spoke. «I will get to the point. Lady Chelsea has been captured by someone.»

Glen showed surprise for an instant, before a cold smile that could freeze the room rose to his lips and he sat back down on the other sofa.

"Tell me in detail," he urged, glaring at the cat-shaped spirit.

«I assume you know that my mistress is visiting Marquis Wisteria's estate.»

The prince nodded in response.

«The Spirit Tree bracelet that I gave to Lady Chelsea is connected to a storage room in the Spirit World. The Spirits taking care of it were in a tizzy about my Mistress being in trouble.» The same Storage Room Spirits had reported Chelsea's exhaustion to Ele during her experience choosing a gown for her social debut. «When I asked them for details, they told me that after a man

screamed and something was broken, men forced their way into the room she was in.»

In contrast to the seemingly calm Ele, Glen was just about ready to fly out of the room.

“...Is she all right?” he strained to squeeze out.

Cat Ele tilted his head. «Did you not give her a ring-shaped magic tool as an engagement ring?»

The ring-shaped magical tool that had been kept in Chronowize’s treasury was one that automatically deployed defensive magic when the wearer was in danger. From what he’d seen using his [Appraisal] Skill, the magic it cast could not be broken. He’d given the national treasure-level ring to Chelsea as her engagement ring.

The moment he realized that she was safe, Glen’s cold smile softened slightly.

Ele continued with his report, telling him that the maid acting as Chelsea’s chaperone had been injured, that she and the daughter of Marquis Wisteria had been tied up, and that Chelsea had been threatened not to do anything if she wanted the others to stay safe.

«From the situation, it is safe to assume that Marquis Wisteria himself has been captured as well.»

“The first thing we need to do is save Chelsea. Let’s start our strategy meeting, then.” Glen nodded, giving Ele a smile like a wolf in front of its prey.

4. A Tiny Spirit

At that moment, I was being held inside of Lady Noel's room, on the second floor of the Wisteria family's villa. Despite her being injured trying to protect me, Martha was tied up on the floor. Lady Noel and her maids were also tied up, although they were sitting. There were three men in black standing around watching us.

Thanks to the ring-shaped magic tool that Lord Glen had given me, I was neither injured nor tied up, only sitting on the couch. But under threat of further injury to the others if I moved, I couldn't do anything.

What should I do... I thought to myself.

Crossing my hands in front of myself as if in prayer, I worried over everything that had happened. While I did, I saw a small speck of light flicker by. I followed it around with my eyes until it came around and stopped flickering in front of me.

«Mice to neet you, Lady Chelsea! I'm a Stowage Spirit... No, I'm a Communicashon Spirit,» said the little Spirit with great difficulty.

A Communication Spirit? Like one from my personal storage room in the Spirit World? But I thought that Ele said the Spirits in charge of my storage were ranked too low to come to our world...?

«Since I told tha king how you were, my rank went up, and I can come owt now!» I was shocked when it seemed to answer the question I'd just thought. «I can heer since I'm a Communicashon Spirit! Everythin' you think, I heer!»

I nearly let out a yelp out of surprise, but I quickly held my mouth closed with my crossed hands. For the time being, I understood that this little light was a Communication Spirit. But there was something I was more confused about at the moment—wouldn't the men see the strange light in front of me as suspicious, and hurt Lady Noel and the others?

«Don't wowwy, Lady Chelsea! You're the only won who can see me!»

If they can't see the Spirit, then there'd be no reason for the men to suspect me.

«I came owt to tell you somethin'!»

A message? I looked straight at the tiny light as it started flickering again.

«I told tha king you were in trubble, and he told Prins Glen.»

Huh? So that means...

«Help is on tha way! Don't wowwy!»

My expression softened as soon as I heard that. The hands that I crossed to hide my mouth moved to hide my face instead. Thanks to the relief the news gave me, my thoughts became a little more clear.

If help is on the way, then it'd be best to stay where I am. But is there anything I could do while I wait? As I thought that, my eyes landed on Martha. She was still on the ground after being thrown to the corner of the room by the tall man. A pained expression was on her face, so she likely incurred a scrape or bruise from earlier.

I can heal Martha! But since I didn't know what the men would do if I moved around on my own, I decided to ask if I could check on her. If I was able to get permission, I could get a Potion Seed out of my Spirit storage and have her drink it. The yellow Potion Seeds, like Elixir Seeds and Aopo Seeds, were round with little corks in them, and drinking one would heal all wounds.

But there would be one problem with that: if I got it out normally, the seed would just pop into existence in front of my eyes. That would probably make the men suspicious... *What to do...*

«I'll go tell tha others to make it appear in your hand!» whispered the little Communication Spirit, shining bright for a second before disappearing. A moment later, the light returned. «I told tha Stowage Spirits! It'll appear right in your pawm, same hand as tha bracelet!»

After giving the Spirit a little nod, I uncrossed my hands and squeezed my fists tight. *Be brave, Chelsea!*

“Um... Excuse me!” I spoke, looking towards the plump man beside Martha.

“Whaddya want?” the plump man grunted. It might have been because I’d stayed quiet until then, but he looked at me suspiciously.

“I won’t leave the room... So please, allow me to check on Martha’s wounds.”

Martha looked at me in shock when I said that, while the plump man glanced towards the tall man and the thin man, who both nodded.

“She’s got nothin’ to do with it, so sure.”

“Thank you very much.”

After thanking the man, I slowly approached Martha before sitting beside her.

“Lady Chelsea...” she whimpered. I felt my chest tighten hearing her.

“Thank you so much for defending me...” I whispered, only for her to start to tear up.

I put my left hand in my pocket, since my bracelet was on my left wrist. As I internally willed for the Spirits to give my Potion Seed back, it popped out in the palm of my hand. I pulled it out as if it had always been in my pocket.

“Drink this,” I ordered quietly, pulling the little cork out of the seed and putting it to her lips. Once I saw her throat move, I quickly pulled it away.

Martha looked shocked for a second, looking up at me.

«‘Lady Chelsea’s medicine is amazing! It doesn’t hurt anymow, but they’d get suspishus if I suddenly wasn’t in pain, so I’ll fake it...’ is what she’s thinkin’,» reported the Communication Spirit, stopping above Martha’s head. At the same moment, her face warped in fake pain.

I gave her a small nod to tell her I understood what she was doing before heading back to the couch. As soon as I sat down, I heard a scuffle from outside. I could hear metal on metal, and shouting.

«Help is here!»

I made sure not to let my joy show on my face when the Communication Spirit spoke again.

“I’ll go help the others,” the tall man muttered after glancing out the window. He left the room shortly after. This left us with just the plump man and the thin

man.

I glanced over at Lady Noel and saw she was smiling. The Spirit floated over to above her head.

«‘Getting owt of ties is part of a lady’s etiquette... I’m gonna knock’em down!’ is what she thought. What does she mean?»

Huh? The second I thought that, Lady Noel slipped right out of the ropes binding her, and tackled the plump man from behind. It was so sudden that the man couldn’t even react, and fell to the floor. Once he was down, she started stomping on him.

The thin man immediately moved from his spot beside the opposite wall...only for Martha to trip him.

When I saw them both on the floor, I quickly whispered my Skill name. “I’ll make a seed—[Seed Creation]!”

With a light pop, a big black, palm-sized, teardrop-shaped seed appeared. What I had wished for was the big anti-monster Venus flytrap I’d thought of back in the greenhouse.

I need to plant it somewhere...! I quickly shoved the seed in the soil under one of the bigger houseplants by the sofa. It sprouted immediately, roots thickening so much they broke the pot. The sprout split into five parts, with leaves big enough to close over a human. The roots split into four parts, standing on the ground like human or animal legs.

I blinked a few times in surprise as one of the leaves faced me and gave something that looked like a bow. I returned it out of instinct.

The big Venus flytrap quickly snatched up the thin man from the floor, trapping him between its leaves. The man flailed, unable to even get a word out.

“Gaah!” The plump man, still free, looked at the plant and shrieked in fear.

Lady Noel looked surprised, but seemed to quickly grasp what was happening. She stopped stomping on the man and backed a few steps away.

The Venus flytrap gave her a little bow before capturing the plump man

between its leaves too. Both of the men's extremities were very closely avoiding the thorny bits on the leaves, so they were uninjured. But they were completely immobile. The plant lifted them up all the way to the ceiling, before slamming them down just barely above the floor.

Is it just me, or does it look like it's having fun...?

While I was busy thinking that, Lady Noel moved to untie the maids as she yelled, "This is our chance to run!"

I hurried to untie Martha too. "Thank you very much," she said just as the door to the room slammed open.

I stiffened up for a moment, thinking it was more of the men in black, but Lord Glen was the one to rush in.

"Chelsea!" he cried, running up and pulling me in for a hug. He nuzzled his face into the crook of my neck and whispered, "Thank goodness you're okay..." I could barely hear him, but I could tell just how worried he had been.

"The ring you gave me kept me safe. Thank you so much," I told him, squeezing him right back. We stayed like that for a while before someone cleared their throat behind us.

Wait, we're in Lady Noel's room, and we aren't alone...! I wiggled a bit, so Lord Glen let me go.

"Guess there's not much I can do about this right now..." he muttered, looking a little bit lonely before his gaze fell behind me. I slowly turned back as he did.

Lady Noel was staring at us, hiding her bright red face behind her hands. Martha had a hand on her hip and an angry expression on her face. Lady Noel's maids were looking away, pretending they hadn't seen anything. The men in black were still caught limply between the giant Venus flytrap's leaves as it shook them up and down. It used its last three leaves to bow to Lord Glen.

"There's a *lot* of things I want to ask, but I'll save them for later," he said, a complicated look on his face.

+ + +

In the end, the men in black who attacked Marquis Wisteria's villa were captured thanks to the efforts of the knights that Lord Glen brought, and Ele wreaking havoc in his Spirit form. The two men who were in Lady Noel's room and caught by the big Venus flytrap had Mana Sealing Bracelets slapped on their wrists before they were set free. They wobbled their way out, now in custody.

Marquis Wisteria, Lady Noel, and the maids and butlers working in the villa were all immediately taken in for questioning. I would need to be questioned too, but because I was a minor and not a resident of the villa, I was sent back to the lodging house and told to rest first.

As the sun set, I watched the street lamps and the light from buildings through the carriage window. Lord Glen still had work to do at the scene, so Martha—who had come as my chaperone—and I were the only ones inside the carriage.

Martha was always so talkative, but all she'd done this ride was sit silently with her head down. *Should I say something...?* I thought to myself as I looked towards her, only for a little light to start flashing.

«'I came as a chaperown, but I'm not worthy of being a maid after scaring Lady Chelsea like that... I've really done somethin' bad...' is what she's thinking,» relayed the Communication Spirit reading her thoughts.

"You really saved me by coming today. Thank you so much, Martha."

Her head shot up at my words. "I should be the one thanking you, Lady Chelsea. You healed my wounds!" she said, tearing up. "Thank you so very much."

Martha bowed deeply. When she straightened up, I saw that she must have cried a bit, because her eyes were wet. I nodded back to her, accepting her thanks.

"And, um, there's something I'd like to ask!" she forced out after dabbing the tears left in her eyes with a handkerchief. "Wasn't the medicine you had me drink to heal my wounds incredibly expensive?"

I made it with my Skill [Seed Creation], so rather than being expensive, it was

completely free...

“No, it wasn’t,” I said, shaking my head.

Martha’s brow furrowed in confusion. “Something that could heal my wounds in a second... Not even just the parts that hurt after slamming into the wall, but my rough hands too... It *has* to be expensive! I might need to split it into installments, but I’ll pay for it!” she cried, bowing again.

“It was just a seed I made with my Skill...” Now that I thought about it, she’d seen me use my Skill to make seeds a number of times, but I’d never explained what the seeds themselves were before.

After I gave her another explanation of my Skill [Seed Creation], Martha’s eyes widened in shock. “So that was a seed you created...”

“Yes.” I nodded.

She suddenly started in realization. “Could it be that the big-leafed plant that caught those men was from another seed you’d created?”

“That’s right. It grew from a seed I made using the Venus flytrap we saw in the carnivorous plant section of the greenhouse as reference.”

Martha’s eyes opened wide in shock, and she pressed her hands against her cheeks. The strange face she was making was sort of funny.

“Your Skill is truly amazing, Lady Chelsea! It was a plant, but it moved around, and bowed, didn’t it?!”

I learned this after Lord Glen came, but the big Venus flytrap could use its thick roots to walk—and after letting the men it had caught go, it wandered the Wisteria Villa’s gardens. Then, when it found a tilled plot that hadn’t had seeds planted in it yet, it replanted itself.

“I hadn’t thought that I could make any moving plants, so I was shocked as well.”

“Lady Chelsea, your Skill has infinite possibilities!” praised Martha, beaming.

I could create any seed I wished for. If I could create a plant that could walk on its own, what else was possible to make?

“Since you’ve made a walking plant, why not a flying plant next? Or maybe a plant that can get you things you can’t reach. Something that could become a step stool would be a good idea too. Oh, oh, and what about plants that can cook or clean?”

And so, for the entire carriage ride back to the lodging house, Martha kept suggesting all sorts of plants I’d never imagined before.

If they’d be of help to everyone, then it might be worth creating them. I decided to discuss it with Lord Glen and Lord Tris as part of our Skill research.

+ + +

“We’re home.”

As soon as Martha and I stepped inside my room at the Royal Research Institute lodging house, Gina and Miss Micah came to greet us.

“Welcome home, Lady Chelsea.”

“Welcome home, Chelsea~! We were worried about you!”

Gina was teary-eyed, while Miss Micah’s tail was pointed straight up in nervousness.

“Before His Highness left, he told us that you were being held somewhere... You aren’t hurt, are you?”

“Not at all,” I replied, shaking my head.

“We were sure you’d be tired when you got home, so I made something that would help against exhaustion for your dinner~!” said Miss Micah, glancing towards the wall to the right. That was where the little tiny kitchen had been, but now the wall had been broken down to connect to the room next door.

“Huh?” I gasped.

I knew they’d be renovating the kitchen, but I had no idea they were going to use the room next door for it. *What happened?!*

Miss Micah’s tail wagged as I stood there in shock. “After I said I wanted it big enough that you could cook with me, this happened~!”

“The room next door was empty anyway, so we had them make the kitchen

into an entire separate room,” Gina told me, her imperative smile completely different from the expression she had on before.

“I-I see.” Somehow I felt like I shouldn’t dig any deeper, so I just nodded.

Since it was so late, my dinner was given to me right away. The still-steaming food was brought out of the kitchen on a cart and placed on the dining table. After saying my prayers to the earth gods, I immediately started eating. Or I would have, had my food not been so hot.

The pork and asparagus gratin really was fresh from the oven, and I had to blow on it a few times to cool it down before I ate it. There was also some delicious cream soup with lots of mushrooms that tasted comforting. And last, but certainly not least, my dessert was unbaked cheesecake with lots of strawberry sauce.

“It’s so delicious...” I murmured to myself, only for Miss Micah to start wagging her tail beside me.

“I can make whatever food you want now~ If there’s anything you’d like, just tell me!”

Something I want to eat... Hmm? Since I had just finished eating, nothing was coming to mind.

“I’ll tell you when I think of anything,” I replied, getting another happy tail wag.

+ + +

After I’d changed into my nightgown and was ready to go to bed, there was a sudden knock on my door. Apparently Lord Glen had come to see me, so I quickly pulled a cardigan over myself and went to greet him.

“Please excuse my rudeness for greeting you wearing this,” I apologized, only for him to look away.

“No, it’s my fault for coming so late...”

Lord Glen was still wearing the same clothes I’d seen him in at the Wisterias’s villa, and he looked absolutely exhausted.

“Why don’t you come sit...”

“Nah, I won’t be here that long.”

It was rare for him not to accept my invitation to come sit down inside. *Is something the matter?* When I looked up at him in confusion, he gave me a gentle smile back.

“I just wanted to give you this,” he said, pulling a little paper package out of seemingly nowhere...or rather, from his Item Box. I accepted it, smelling something nice from inside. “Since sometimes people have nightmares or trouble sleeping after a scare, I brought you some lavender potpourri to help you sleep.”

The lavender potpourri was in a little pink cloth bag that sat right in the palm of my hand. *He brought this because he was worried about me...!*

“Thank you very much. I’ll be careful with it,” I said, thanking him with a smile.



A blush spread over his cheeks. "Seeing you enjoy it so much makes me happy too."

We spent a few moments smiling at each other before I heard Gina clear her throat.

"I wasn't intending to stay long. Now that I've seen you're all right, I'll get going," Lord Glen said, lifting my right hand to kiss the back of it. "Good night, Chelsea."

Since this was the first time he'd ever touched me like that, I just stood there embarrassed with my lips flapping as he left the room.

+ + +

Thanks to the lavender potpourri, I was able to sleep soundly and nightmare free. The morning after, I was to be questioned in my personal lab during my daily mana pool-growing tea party.

Since Lord Glen wanted to question everyone alone if possible, Martha left the room after serving our tea and sweets. The only ones left inside were Lord Glen, myself, and a knight standing in front of the door. Apparently the knight had been among those who came to the rescue the day before.

"Okay, so about yesterday... Can you tell me what first made you realize something was wrong?"

"Yes," I replied, nodding.

Then I told him everything that transpired yesterday... About how Lady Noel rushed out of the room after we heard something breaking and a man screaming. How as soon as she came back, the men forced their way in, leading to Martha being injured while protecting me. Also, how the men said that "the Proxy" spoke of me. Everything I could remember.

"The Proxy, huh..." Lord Glen murmured.

"I recall hearing of her multiple times while we were in the Radzuel Empire, but...who is she?" I asked, only for him to look back at me, blinking.

"Oh yeah, I didn't talk to you about her, did I? The Proxy is supposedly the person who worked with the Spirit King Ele to bring prosperity to the world

during the age of mythology, after the gods created the world.”

The age of mythology was long past. Is the Proxy still alive? If she is, why isn't Ele with her? Tons of questions popped up inside my brain before disappearing.

“Let’s leave the Proxy stuff for later and get back on topic...”

I nodded at his words, and continued telling him about what happened in Lady Noel’s room.

“Then the Communication Spirit appeared...”

Lord Glen gave me a confused look when I said that.

Since the Spirit was flickering on top of the teapot, I gestured to it and said, “It’s this little light right here...”

«Tha only ones who can see me are other Spirits and Lady Chelsea!» the Communication Spirit declared proudly, for some reason.

Lord Glen’s expression changed. “I just heard a voice,” he said, looking curious as he reached out towards the teapot that I’d just pointed to. The Spirit dodged his hand, floating up. “...I should probably get the details from Ele, huh.”

As soon as he said that, the Communication Spirit started spinning through the air. «I’ll call for tha king!» it cried before disappearing into the Spirit Tree bracelet on my left wrist.

A moment later, Ele appeared to the side of the table in his cat form.

«What do you want?» he asked, hopping up into the seat beside me and yawning.

“I can’t see the Communication Spirit, so I can’t appraise it. Can you tell me more about it?”

«Oho...? So even you cannot see it, Glen? That’s interesting.»

After widening his eyes in surprise, the cat-formed Spirit cackled. *It’s really weird seeing a cat laugh...* I thought. Once he was finished laughing, Ele floated into the air.

«The Communication Spirit that you cannot see is of the lowest rank able to appear in this world,» he explained as he lightly poked at the other Spirit with a

paw. «Normally, low-ranked Spirits move based on their own principles, or on orders from higher-ranking ones. But sometimes, those who do something for someone else's sake appear.»

The Communication Spirit screeched and laughed in glee every time Ele's paw touched it.

«When those Spirits continue taking action for another's sake, their rank rises, and they become higher-ranking Spirits.»

“So this Communication Spirit acted for Chelsea's sake?” Lord Glen asked, getting a nod from the Spirit.

«Indeed. It was originally one of the Spirits caring for Lady Chelsea's personal storage room. After reporting on her status a number of times, its rank rose.»

Now that I thought about it, I remembered that one of the Storage Spirits warned the Spirit of Fire, Irene, that we were being attacked by the fake fortune-teller on the way back to the Sargent Margraviate from the Radzuel Empire.

«Due to its new rank, it became able to come to this world, but only as a small light for now.» Ele gave it a big push with his paw, and the little Communication Spirit started floating around the room. «If it continues to be of help, it may become tangible.»

“I've got the gist about the Communication Spirit, so I'll get back to questioning,” said Lord Glen, turning to look at me again.

After giving him another nod, I continued recounting what happened after the Spirit appeared. “Once the Spirit told me that help was on the way, I decided to wait inside the room.”

I explained that I wanted to do anything I could while I waited, and asked the men if they'd let me tend to Martha's wounds. Lord Glen blinked at me in confusion.

“You negotiated with the attackers...? Weren't you scared?”

“Now that I think back to it... I wasn't afraid after I realized they couldn't hurt me,” I answered.

He groaned. “That’s probably thanks to what you endured back in the Eucharis Barony, huh.”

Back at the barony, physical abuse like being whipped was the norm, and I never had a day free of pain. Pain was scary, but as long as it didn’t hurt, I wasn’t scared. That line of thinking might have taken root deep inside my heart.

“So? How did you tend to her wounds?”

“I had a Potion Seed sent to the inside of my pocket, and had Martha drink it,” I said, willing the return of a Potion Seed. The yellow seed with its little cork popped into existence on my palm. “This is the seed I’d given her to drink.”

When I showed Lord Glen the seed, he gave me a wry smile. “Another amazing seed, eh?”

«Its effect of healing all wounds isn’t much different from an Elixir Seed.»

Elixir Seeds cured all illnesses, while Potion Seeds healed all wounds. In my mind, they were different. *Am I wrong?*

Ele, still in his cat form, let out a big sigh at my look of confusion. «As far as I am aware, there are no drinkable medicines that heal wounds.»

“Huh?”

“Most medications that heal wounds are topical, and take a few days to heal, at that. The only thing that should fully heal wounds is the [Cure] Skill.”

«Which means... We must hide the Potion Seed’s existence, just as we have the Elixir Seed.»

So we have to hide it just like the Elixir and Aopo Seeds... My shoulders drooped at the realization.

“Can you tell me what happened next?”

I nodded. “Once I’d taken care of her wounds, we heard a fuss outside... One of the men in the room left, so Lady Noel freed herself from her bonds and pinned one of the remaining two down, while Martha tripped the other. I thought that I should help as well, so I created a new seed and planted it in a pot.”

The Wisterias's villa had a wonderful botanical garden. And I'd seen the carnivorous Venus flytrap there. I told Lord Glen how I'd thought of planting them in places where monsters appeared in order to catch them, and that I made them follow my orders to stop them from accidentally catching people.

When I finished explaining my idea, he started chuckling like a demon lord. "Ha ha ha. For catching monsters, huh? That thought came so naturally to you, since the Sargent Margraviate borders the Demonic Forest and its monsters."

"Yes."

"I used [Appraise] on the big Venus flytrap after it replanted itself in the garden, and the results said that it catches those who threaten you," Lord Glen continued, pulling the palm-sized, teardrop-shaped black seed from his Item Box. "We got a report that it withered overnight and left a single seed. This one."

So the big Venus flytrap that used its leaves to bow ended up withering...

"If you plant this, it'll protect you whenever you need it. Keep it safe for emergencies."

I took the teardrop-shaped black seed and caressed it. "Understood. I'll have the Storage Spirits hold it," I murmured, and the big Venus flytrap seed vanished.

Interlude 2: Glen

After finishing Chelsea's questioning, I took the chef Micah along with me to the prison tower on the east edge of the citadel. This was where the men we caught yesterday were being held.

Yesterday, I had used my [Appraise] Skill to get the men's personal information, like their names, jobs, and ages. I'd also had the knights investigate them themselves, but not a single one of the attackers gave up their reasoning for visiting the Wisteria Villa or taking Chelsea and the others hostage.

I had no other choice than to bring Micah out. While she was a chef with the [Cooking] Skill, she also had the Sage-level [Interrogation] Skill as well.

I had asked the foxwoman if she could use her Skill, and she'd gripped her fist tightly and declared, "Since I wasn't able to be there for Chelsea when she was in trouble, I'll do my best to make up for it~!"

And so, we walked into the interrogation room with her all ready to go. Inside, the plump man who'd been caught by the huge Venus flytrap sat with a Mana Sealing bracelet on him. I looked to the knight who had been questioning him prior, but he just shook his head. It seemed they were keeping just as silent as the day before.

While heaving a sigh, I switched places with the knight and sat in front of the man. "Double-checking here, but your name is what?"

The man didn't answer my question, looking off to the side silently. I heaved another sigh.

"Your name is Bacchus, you're twenty-eight years old, and you used to be a peddler—but your current class is 'Worshiper of the Proxy, Driven by Envy,'" I said, reading off his appraised stats, and...he finally looked at me. "Looks like you're fine. Since you have no status ailments, you should be able to talk."

Bacchus looked incredibly unhappy when I said that.

"Worshiper of the Proxy, Driven by Envy." The same class as the swindler who

had gotten Radzuel's former emperor to chop down all its Spirit Trees. Thinking back, the swindler had a blessing called "Ash of the Spirit Tree of Origin," but Bacchus didn't.

"So you don't have the blessing, huh?"

"How did you—" He stood up from his chair. Anyone could tell how shaken he was at that statement.

The effect of "Ash of the Spirit Tree of Origin" was the ability to teleport and transfer, and also protection from the effects of miasma. Not a single one of the men we'd brought to the prison tower had it. Did that mean that the ones who did teleported away?

"So the blessed abandoned you?"

Bacchus's face went bright red at my leading question.

"Yeah, they did! They used us as bait and ran away!" he yelled, glaring at the table. "Us neophytes don't have the blessing, and those with it always treat us like trash! And, unable to bear seeing it, the attendant told us that if we show that we're useful, he would ask Her Lady the Proxy to bless us as well!"

"And how were you going to be useful?"

"We were—" The man suddenly seemed to realize something. "I can't... I can't forgive those bastards, but I won't betray Her Lady the Proxy!" he said before snapping his mouth shut.

From what he'd just said, there were others. I needed to press him further.

"I'd like for you to take over for the rest, Micah," I said, looking over to her.

She nodded, pumping her fists up. "I'm on it~!"

I stood up, and Micah took my place sitting. After taking a big breath, she straightened up. "Micah will now use her skill [Interrogation]. Please answer in detail," the foxwoman said in a tone completely different from her usual.

"Bacchus, what was the purpose of your group's visit to the Wisteria Villa?"



“To gain access to a strengthening herb from the botanical gardens and bring it to our comrades.” The words slipped from Bacchus’s mouth, much to his shock.

One of the plants growing in a corner of the gardens had been completely pulled up. When we checked with Marquis Wisteria, we learned it was a strengthening herb. They worked like nutritional pick-me-ups in my past life, by strengthening you for a period before draining you completely afterwards. And just like curing meat, they took a day after harvesting for them to have any effects. The effect would also weaken the longer they were kept. *Why would they want a herb so hard to use and difficult to distribute?*

Micah seemed to have the same question. “What were you planning on using the herbs for?”

“To feed the monsters we keep,” answered Bacchus, shaking so much his teeth chattered.

“And what would happen if you fed the herbs to them?”

“When they’re overfed with the herbs, they get so energized that they go into a rage.”

Shocked, I looked over to Micah. She nodded and continued using her [Interrogation] Skill.

“What were you planning on using the monsters for?”

Bacchus covered his mouth with his hands, trying to stop himself from talking, but the words easily came through. “We’d destroy the Spirit Tree of Origin and assassinate the pink-haired girl.”

The moment I heard that, I gave Bacchus an icy look. When he noticed, he became blatantly terrified.

“Why don’t you tell us more?”

After that, I had Micah use her [Interrogation] right up until she was dry on mana, and we learned exactly when and where they were planning on doing things.

+ + +

“Using Micah’s [Interrogation] Skill, we’ve learned the men’s goal.”

Once the interrogation was over, I headed back to Chelsea’s personal lab and spoke to Ele in his Spirit form.

“Their first goal is destroying the Spirit Tree of Origin within the citadel. Their second is assassinating Chelsea.”

“Why would they target them?” Ele murmured, furrowing his brow. Outside of the window were the glass-like leaves and trunk of the Spirit Tree of Origin, sparkling red in the setting sun.

“Shouldn’t you know the reason the best out of all of us?”

Ele looked down, sighing. “I know that the Proxy is involved.”

As the King of Spirits, Ele could see a target’s information just like the [Appraise] Skill being used.

“The Proxy’s attendant apparently ordered both the Tree destroying and Chelsea’s assassination because ‘The Proxy would be happy.’” When I told Ele what Bacchus had said, the Spirit sounded depressed.

“If the Spirit Tree of Origin is destroyed, I would be forced back to the Spirit World. If Lady Chelsea were killed, I would lose my contractor and have no reason to stay here,” explained Ele, sighing deeply. “I wonder if the Proxy hates me...”

“I wonder too... The one who gave the order was the attendant, not the Proxy herself,” I said, and Ele’s expression grew harsh.

“So *She* is being used?”

“I’d like to ask her that myself.”

Spirit Ele put a hand to his lips. “It may cause Lady Chelsea some concern, but I should go see the Proxy...”

“Let’s focus on catching the guys who are after the Spirit Tree and Chelsea first.”

The Spirit nodded, before addressing me. “Glen. Did you not put a barrier around the Spirit Tree?”

“I did.”

“And you gave Lady Chelsea a ring with defensive magic, yes?”

“Yep. Neither the Tree nor Chelsea will ever be harmed,” I declared. “The worshipers with blessings should be bringing their monsters tonight.”

The effects of the strengthening herbs would only begin appearing after midday today, and Bacchus had told us that the worshipers wore black to blend in with the darkness. That meant that they’d put their plan into action tonight.

“We’ll have to teach them that any attempts against us are futile,” said Spirit Ele with a chuckle. I gave him a strong nod back.



5. Shining Grass

That evening, Lord Glen came to see me in my room. We sat across from each other on the sofas.

“Sorry for coming this late.”

He was apologizing, but since I usually didn’t do much more than read around this time before dinner, there was no problem at all. Really, I was just happy to see him!

“There’s something I need to tell you,” he said vaguely before sending all of my maids aside from Miss Micah, who was cooking dinner, out of the room. “I had Micah interrogate the men we caught this afternoon.”

I nodded. *If I’m not mistaken, Miss Micah has a Sage-level [Interrogation] Skill, and could make anyone answer any question.* I thought back to the time I’d seen her use the Skill back in the Radzuel Empire.

“Tonight, those men will be coming to attack both you and the Spirit Tree of Origin.”

After saying that, Lord Glen explained in detail what the men were aiming for, and how they were going to use strengthening herbs to make the monsters go berserk.

“I’ve put a barrier around the Spirit Tree of Origin, and you’ve got your ring with its defensive magic. Whatever happens, you won’t be hurt at all.”

I looked down at the engagement ring on my right ring finger. The magic tool had already protected me with defensive magic back in Lady Noel’s room.

“But just in case anything happens, I’d like for you to stay beside the tree for tonight.”

“Why?”

“If both of the things we’re protecting are in different places, it thins our defenses. There’s also the fact that if you’re in the same place, all the enemies

will go there as well, so we can defeat them in one fell swoop.”

I nodded in understanding. “Um... So when should I go to the Spirit Tree?”

“As soon as possible,” said Lord Glen, putting his hands to his lips. “The men are supposed to wear black to blend in with the night.”

So when the sun goes down and it gets dark, they’ll be sneaking around... Since the Spirit Tree was beside the Royal Research Institute, the light coming from the lab window should stop it from being pitch black out, but the men’s clothes would still make it hard to see them.

“It seems it would be hard to catch them if they’re wearing black.”

“We’re planning on using the *Light* spell to light up the area, but...”

If only I could light up the area in an instant like with magic... But then I had an idea.

I immediately willed the Spirit Tree bracelet on my left wrist to give me back my plant book, and it popped into existence in my hand. I opened it up and flipped to the page for a type of moss called luminous moss, showing Lord Glen.

“What about planting seeds for grass that glows like this luminous moss?” Luminous moss was a special variety that only grew in specific caves, and lit up when touched. “If we planted grass around the Spirit Tree that lit up by the sound of my voice, rather than by touch...”

Lord Glen grinned like a child ready to make mischief as I explained my idea.

“That’s great. If we had constant light, it’d be easier for the knights and mages to move.”

“Instead of just around the Spirit Tree, why don’t we plant it along the entire south side of the Research Institute?” I said. “It would be easier to fight with more room.”

“And of course, it’d have to grow fast enough that we could use it tonight.”

As the two of us hammered out the details of the glowing grass, I thought of the result. “Make seeds for grass that lights up with my voice—[Seed Creation]!”

With a little pop, a small, thin seed fell into my palm.

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That night, I sat on a cushion up in the branches of the Spirit Tree. Apparently the top of the tree was within the limits of the barrier.

Ele was in his cat form on my lap, and the Communication Spirit was above my head, so I wasn't lonely. Lord Glen had actually told me he'd stay with me until the men showed up, but...

«Lady Chelsea may sit in the Spirit Tree of Origin as its creator, but I could never allow anyone else to climb it,» declared Ele. And so, I alone was allowed up.

As the night wore on and most of the lights in the Research Institute went out, the Communication Spirit sparkled as it flew through the air. «Tha bad guys're here!»

I looked down to the ground at its words. I could see shadows, if only barely. There were audible footsteps coming from the grass, so I knew they were close.

«This is your chance!» cried the Spirit.

I shouted, "Grass, light up!" The grass all around the Spirit Tree lit up at once.

"Wha?!" one of the men cried out. The other men looked towards where my voice had come from and saw me up in the tree.

"There's the pink-haired girl!" yelled the tall man, pointing at me. I recognized him from the incident in Lady Noel's room.

"This is great, having both our targets in the same place!" screamed the man closest to the Spirit Tree, who had a deep voice.

But then the tall man shook his head. "Nah, attacks won't work on her."

"No way that's true," the other man said, shooting an arrow at me. Since I was inside the Spirit Tree of Origin's barrier, it was knocked back quite a distance from me. "Urgh, you're right."

"What do we do now?"

"If we can cut down the tree, she might fall out of it and hurt herself. Maybe

even *die*,” said the deep-voiced man, getting nods from the rest. “Okay, so we go along with the plan.”

Seeming quite calm despite the shining grass, he threw something on the ground. It broke, and smoke started spreading around it.

“Time for you guys’ favorite snack: tree roots!”

At the same time as he screamed, the smoke disappeared, revealing lots of big rats the size of humans. After looking around for a moment, the rats rushed towards the Spirit Tree.

The men looked at the rats, then smirked up at me. But then the rats were stopped by an invisible wall a few steps away from the tree.

“Huh?”

Just as the men grunted in confusion, Lord Glen, the knights, and the mages appeared from where they were waiting.

“*Shutdown!*” screamed Lord Glen, casting a spell. The spell was to make it impossible to teleport or transfer anything, and was apparently only usable by Lord Glen himself. “We’ve put a strong barrier around the Spirit Tree of Origin. Be it monsters or fire, you can’t damage it at all.”

“That can’t be!” the same man who doubted the others’ words yelled again, shooting an arrow at the tree. It hit the invisible barrier with an odd-sounding *ping* before falling to the ground.

Panic began to set in on the men’s faces.

“Uraaaaargh!” The tall man pulled a knife from his pocket and charged at a nearby knight. When the sound of metal on metal rang out, the other men ran at the knights and mages.

One of them aimed his bow at Lord Glen.

“No!” I screamed, throwing the big Venus flytrap seed I’d had on hand towards him. As soon as it hit the ground, it grew five leaves in a flash. The huge plant immediately caught the man with the bow between its leaves, keeping him still.

“...?!” The man seemed to be so shocked he couldn’t make a sound.

When I looked over to Lord Glen, he mouthed “thank you” up at me.

“That should be enough.”

At some point, Ele had turned into his Spirit form and was standing at the base of the tree.

“*Lightning!*” he cried, raining thunderbolts down on the huge rats and knocking them out.

“Dammit, retreat!” one of the men screamed, realizing that they were losing.

The other men immediately threw away their weapons and clutched their hands in front of their chest as if in prayer.

“Our Lady the Proxy, please lend us your power!”

But nothing happened.

“Why aren’t we teleporting?!”

“Has She abandoned us?!”

“She would never!”

The reason they couldn’t teleport was because of the spell Lord Glen had cast, but no one mentioned that. It was probably better for their later interrogations if they thought they’d been abandoned. While they were confused, all of the men were fitted with Mana Sealing bracelets and taken into custody.

Interlude 3: Glen

All of the men taken in had the blessing “Ash of the Spirit Tree of Origin,” which allowed them to teleport. I chose the one who had been caught and shaken by the huge Venus flytrap as the one I’d interrogate.

The man’s name was Billy. His class was “Former Hunter and Worshiper of the Proxy, Driven by Envy.” He had the blessing “Ash of the Spirit Tree of Origin” as well.

When I entered the interrogation room, Billy was already sitting down, looking veritably upset. I set down a potted, normal Venus flytrap on the table between us.

“That’s—” Billy instantly started shaking, looking terrified. Being swung up and down by the huge Venus flytrap must have been traumatic. I’d brought it as a threat to mess with him, and it seemed to have worked.

“Okay. Tell us what you know,” I ordered, giving him a harsh look.

Glancing at the potted Venus flytrap, Billy spoke. They’d gone to the Wisteria Villa to try to trade for the strengthening herbs. When they met, the current marquis refused, stating that the plants were his grandmother’s, and that they needed to talk with her instead. When talks broke down, they called in their comrades who were lying in wait. The blessed stole the herbs while the unblessed were left to go wild as decoys.

They brought the stolen strengthening herbs to the Proxy’s attendant’s manor in the Demonic Forest. The next day, the attendant gave them a small bottle to use for calling the root-eating rats that had been driven berserk by overfeeding them the herbs. They planned to destroy the Spirit Tree and kill Chelsea that night.

Seemingly becoming desperate halfway through, Billy spilled everything.

“Th-That’s it...” he said, looking away from the Venus flytrap.

I stared at him in silence for a while. I didn’t feel like anything he’d said was a

lie, but that made me question things further.

“This has been bothering me, but was it the Proxy herself who ordered this?”

“No. Her attendant planned it, saying that She would be happy if we cut down the Spirit Tree of Origin.”

“What about the part about assassinating Chelsea?”

“If I remember right, when the pink-haired girl showed up on the magical mirror that can show any place in the world, Her Lady said ‘Unforgivable,’ so we were told to kill her...”

“So the Proxy ordered you to kill her?”

“No! Her Ladyship the Proxy is kind. She would never order that!”

“Then who did?”

“...Her attendant.” As soon as he said it, he seemed to realize something.

“Wait, did the attendant trick us?!”

“Seems likely.”

“That bastard!” cried Billy, shaking in rage.

6. Apologies and Thanks

Since I'd stayed up later than usual the night before, it was just before noon when I finally woke up. Apparently everyone had let me sleep since they thought I must have been tired.

After getting dressed, I had a very pleasant brunch. Miss Micah made her special eggs Benedict, with bacon and avocado in between, which was very delicious.

While I sipped my post-meal tea, Gina came to me with a letter.

"Lady Noel, daughter of Marquis Wisteria, would like to see you. How will we reply?"

"I'd like to see her as soon as possible."

Gina smiled at my response. "Then I'll send the message."

Just as the bell struck three in the afternoon, Lady Noel arrived at my room. I hadn't expected her to come the same day as I replied, so I was surprised.

"Please, do sit down."

Though I urged her to sit down on the sofa, she wouldn't move. She looked a bit sad, almost listless.

When I tilted my head curiously, she suddenly bowed her head down.

"Lady Chelsea, I'm terribly sorry about what happened a few days ago!"

"Huh?!" I blurted, shocked at the suddenness of her apology.

Still bowing her head, she continued, "I'm sorry for what happened in my home!"

The maids, seemingly catching on to what was happening, quietly left the room.

"If I hadn't run out into the hall after hearing my father's scream, you wouldn't have been caught up in everything. I really am sorry," Miss Noel

apologized, tears dropping to the floor.

“P-Please, raise your head!” But despite my panicked plea, she wouldn’t do as I asked. “Um... I could tell just how much you treasured your family during my visit.”

Head still down, she nodded along with my words.

“I don’t think there’s a person alive who could stay still hearing someone they love cry out like that.”

If I’d heard anyone from the Sargent Margraviate scream like that, I would’ve rushed out just the same as she did. They were just that kind to me. And it was because they were my beloved family that I would act.

It seemed Miss Noel was listening to me, but she still wouldn’t raise her head.

I thought back to something mother had told me: *“Sometimes, when someone comes to apologize to you, they won’t accept it until you say you’ll forgive them. When that happens, you should make your forgiveness conditional.”*

I heaved a small sigh and said, “I will forgive you. But only on one condition.”

“A-And what’s that?” she whispered, head still down.

“Become my friend again.”

“What?!” Shocked by my words, her face finally shot up. “But...I caused you so much trouble! Can we really still be friends?!”

“You know, Lady Noel,” I said, dropping the politeness and ladylike tone for my usual one, “that was the first time in my entire life I’d ever gone to a friend’s house to play. It was really fun. I want to see your gardens once more. The food was delicious too, so I’d like to eat it again. And I want to sneak out into town to go shopping with you. Isn’t the fact that I’m thinking like that proof that we’re still friends?”

Lady Noel’s tears started streaming down her face at my words. “I... I want to sneak out and play with you too. And have tea parties! I want to wear matching accessories, and talk about our favorite things!”

“Then we’re friends from now on.”

“Okay!” She smiled, still crying.

+ + +

The next day, Lord Glen came to my lab after having finished processing the events of two nights earlier. As we started our usual mana pool-growing tea party, he thanked me.

“I appreciate you helping us catch those men.”

All I could do was blink in surprise. It was just as sudden as Lady Noel’s apology.

“It was thanks to you drawing all of their attention to the top of the Spirit Tree that we were able to easily bring them into custody. The knights and mages said that the brightly glowing lawn made it a lot easier to fight too.”

My heart warmed up at his kind words. “I’m glad that I was of any help,” I said honestly, only for Lord Glen to smile brightly.

“That was my appreciation as the one in charge of the operation,” he continued, standing up and moving beside my chair. “This...is my personal thanks. Thank you for protecting me.”

He kneeled down, taking my hand into his and pressing a kiss onto the back of it. My heart leapt at the warmth of his lips, and my cheeks heated up as well.

“I was supposed to be protecting you, so I hadn’t expected you to protect me... Honestly, I was shocked.” Lord Glen looked up at me, dazzlingly beautiful.

After we’d enjoyed all of the treats, the both of us moved to sit on the sofa and chat about the battle. Apparently the huge Venus flytrap seed that I’d thrown was very useful in capturing the men. Lord Glen told me it was great at knocking people out without actually hurting them.

“The fact that it’ll always be on your side is great.”

While we were chatting about that, Ele appeared in his Spirit form.

“Has something happened?”

“Is everything all right?”

It was rare for him to show up in Spirit form.

“I have something I must ask of you, Lady Chelsea,” the Spirit King said, looking downwards guiltily.

Lord Glen and I looked at each other. He looked just as confused as I was, so he must not have known what Ele was about to say.

“What do you need?”

“About what the Fire Spirit Rene spoke about back in the Radzuel Empire’s capital...” started Ele before going into detail.

He spoke about how the Proxy—who had supposedly ordered the attack against me—was an old acquaintance of his, and that he’d like to meet her and talk. She lived in the middle of the Demonic Forest, and because Rene and the other three Great Spirits had erected a strong barrier for her, they wouldn’t be able to meet until it was removed.

We would require cuttings of the Spirit Tree of Origin in order to summon those Great Spirits, just as we had done with Rene. And the only ones who could plant cuttings of the Spirit Tree of Origin were Ele, the King of Spirits, and his contractor...

“You’d like for me to plant more cuttings so that you can meet with the Proxy?” I asked him, getting a nod back. “All right.”

My answer was instant. It wasn’t that hard for me to plant cuttings. Really, it was harder for Ele, who had to both prepare the cutting branch and safeguard it during transport. *If we planted them close to the citadel, it might be easier on Ele since he wouldn’t have to preserve the branch for as long.*

But as I thought that, Ele spoke again. “The cutting must be planted somewhere just as far away as the Radzuel Empire.”

“Huh?” I squeaked out of shock. *We have to go that far?!*

Lord Glen looked pensive. “I guessed we’d have to plant more cuttings if we wanted to talk to the Proxy, but... You mean we need to plant them in other countries?”

“In accordance with ancient limitations, the Great Spirits cannot appear if their trees are planted too closely.”

“Guess there’s nothing we can do about that then. Leave the negotiations with other countries to me.”

Since Emperor Royz of the Radzuel Empire had been the one to request it, planting the cutting had been easy. But with other countries, we’d have to get permission, a location to plant, and someone to take care of it.

“But, I’m definitely coming with you when you go to plant them.”

“You’ll come with me?”

“Of course I will,” Lord Glen said with a smile.

7. Engagement Announcement

Five months later...

Talks were proceeding steadily with the foreign countries we sought permission from to plant cuttings of the Spirit Tree in. However, due to the fact that we still had yet to finish preparing a cutting branch, it didn't seem like we'd be leaving anytime soon.

Today was our long-awaited engagement announcement. Lots of things had been happening in preparation for this day.

First off was my gown. I'd promised to let Lord Glen choose it, so after being measured, I had no idea what color or style it would be until the final fitting. Apparently he'd wanted to surprise me.

The base dress was white in an A-line style, with aqua decorations placed throughout that matched Lord Glen's eyes. It didn't look childish with me wearing it at thirteen. It actually might have made me look older.

Next were my dance lessons. Lord Glen and I would be expected to dance at the announcement party. I'd practiced dancing with my brothers back when I was in the Sargent Margraviate, so I more or less knew how to dance, but...
People will be watching us!

Thus, due to my lack of confidence, Lord Glen made time to help me practice. I would have gotten someone else to teach me, but he'd said, "Instead of learning with another person, it'd be better for you to get used to how dancing with me feels." I would later find out that he'd said that because he didn't want me dancing with any other men.

So even Lord Glen gets possessive... I was both surprised and happy.

After all that, I was massaged head to toe with fragrant oils every day, and had my face and hair painted with things called masks to make my skin and hair beautiful. I also started taking walks in the gardens to increase my stamina, as suggested by Lady Noel. She told me that staying still gradually makes it harder

to move, so it's important to get some exercise in. And she was right. The more I walked, the better I felt. I'd also gotten friendly enough with the nobles who I saw in the gardens to greet them.

"Lady Chelsea?" My personal maid Gina called my name since I'd been spacing out in front of my dressing room mirror. "Is something the matter?"

"Ah... I'm fine. I was just thinking back on the last half-year," I replied, shaking my head.

She smiled brightly. "Let's get you in your gown then!"

I nodded, and then another maid brought out a corset. "Please come over here so I can tie it for you," she said, quickly putting it on me and tightening the lace up.

It always fit perfectly, with no discomfort at all. When I'd told that to Lady Noel, she'd been shocked, saying that was impossible. Apparently they were usually tied painfully tight to give you a certain silhouette.

"You aren't going to tie it any tighter?" I asked, only to get a head shake back.

"In your case, Lady Chelsea, you have no excess fat, so there's no need to tie it any tighter. I'll loosen it up to where it will just straighten your back, so please make sure to eat all the delicious food you can."

Now that I thought about it, they'd said the same thing the first time I'd been put in a corset. *It's been a year and I'm still so thin... I should eat more...* Preparations kept progressing while I was thinking, and before I knew it, I'd been put in my gown. After that, they put a light layer of makeup on me, did my hair, and arranged my accessories. Finally, I was done.

"Perfect!" Martha exclaimed, and all of the maids nodded in agreement.

A little while after I was ready, Lord Glen came to get me. He was so handsome in his deep-blue jacket that I couldn't help but admire him. He smiled happily when our eyes met.

"It looks even better on you than I'd expected."

My cheeks burned when I realized he was complimenting me. He was the one who chose my gown for today.

“You look wonderful too...” I managed to squeak out.

It was his turn to blush. “It’s kinda embarrassing to hear you say that...”

We smiled at each other, cheeks bright red.

After that, I held onto his arm as we headed towards the party. We took the same path through the Royal Research Institute that I’d taken to get to my social debut, heading inside the palace. Then we walked not towards the party hall itself, but to the residential castle.

In our meetings earlier, I’d been told that we’d be entering from a special entrance especially for royalty, but we were getting farther and farther from the hall. *Where exactly are we going?* I thought, tilting my head.

Lord Glen gave me an impish smile before whispering in my ear, “There’s a room in the castle connected via teleportation circle to the royal waiting room beside the party hall.”

A teleportation circle... Those were magical devices that could bring you to another place in an instant when provided with mana. I’d used them before to get between the Research Institute and the training grounds and fields.

“So that’s why we’re headed towards the residential castle.” As I nodded along, we passed through the connecting hallway and went inside. We were now within the barrier, so only those with permission—those who were trustworthy enough—could enter.

From there we stepped inside a room on the first floor. The wallpaper was a subdued cream color, with a fireplace, some sofas, and a low table inside. There was also a big circle I could recognize from the Research Institute off to the corner, with a little stand holding a copper box. There were no other decorations to be seen.

“His Majesty and Her Majesty aren’t here yet, so let’s wait for them.”

“All right,” I replied with a nod before sitting beside Lord Glen on the sofa. Maids set out easy-to-eat snacks, treats, and tea on the table before moving back to wait by the walls.

“I don’t know if you’ll get a chance to eat at the party, so it’d be a good idea

to eat something now,” Lord Glen said, picking up a bite-sized sandwich off of the table and tossing it in his mouth. “Egg, huh?” After chewing and swallowing his sandwich, he picked up another one and raised it to my lips. “You have one too. Say ‘ahhh.’”

I obediently opened my mouth and ate it. It was just as good as the sandwich I’d eaten forever ago in the carriage. Once I swallowed it, he lifted up a different sandwich. I ate that too, and then noticed the bewitched smile on his face.

I glanced over to the maids off by the wall and the royal guard standing by the door, only to see them bashfully looking away. I’d been fed like this by my grandfather and brothers back in the Sargent Margraviate, so I hadn’t really thought anything of it. My grandmother and mother hadn’t stopped them, but maybe being fed like that was supposed to be embarrassing?

I wanted to ask Lord Glen, but I couldn’t get a word in as he kept on feeding me sandwiches, biscuits, and chocolate.

What should I do? While I was thinking that, the king and queen walked into the room. I quickly forced down the chocolate in my mouth and rushed to stand.

“Relax. We’ve got time,” said His Majesty, sitting on the opposite sofa to us beside the queen and signaling for both Lord Glen and I to sit back down.

As we did, Her Majesty smiled. “Glen was the one to choose tonight’s dress, wasn’t he?”

“Yes,” I replied with a nod.

She looked over to Lord Glen. “You did a good job. It brings out Chelsea’s adorableness and beauty wonderfully.”

“I know her good points best, after all,” he replied, wrapping an arm around my waist and pulling me close.

“I wonder. I think I know her pretty well too!” the queen shot back with a giggle and a smile.

I thought they got along fairly well. Was I wrong? I wondered to myself, looking back and forth between them before I heard His Majesty chuckle.

“Settle down, you two. You’re worrying Chelsea.”

The moment the words left the king’s lips, the two looked surprised, glancing over at me. They were both frowning apologetically.

“I-I’m quite all right,” I said, shaking my head.

The four of us snacked for a while, before a man—the prime minister—appeared from the teleportation circle.

“It is time,” he told us.

“Let’s get going then.”

At His Highness’s prompting, we moved to stand on the circle. It seemed that the prime minister would be the one to actually use the device, as the king put his hand on the man’s right shoulder, while Lord Glen touched his left. Lord Glen had his arm around my waist, while the queen held her husband’s arm tightly.

“Please hold on tight as I begin the teleportation,” said the prime minister, tapping the floor three times with his heel.

The moment he did, the circle glowed bluish-white before our surroundings changed instantly. The wallpaper changed from subdued cream to complex patterns, and we could hear the buzzing of the crowd.

“We’ve arrived...”

Soon we’ll be announcing our engagement. The second I realized that, I started to get nervous. *What if...I mess something up?*

As I fretted, Lord Glen leaned over and whispered in my ear. “Worried?”

I nodded, unable to get any words out.

“I’ll teach you an old trick,” he whispered, drawing a tulip on my palm with his finger. It tickled a bit, and I held back a giggle. “Now eat it.”

I wasn’t really sure what he meant, but I raised my palm to my lips and mimed eating it. “Um...”

“It’s a distraction. Are you still nervous?”

Now that I thought about it, I’d been so caught up in wondering what the

tulip was for, I'd forgotten to be worried.

"Thank you very much," I whispered, getting a glad smile back.

"Please wait while I announce your arrival," said the prime minister, walking towards the hall.

While we waited, the maids who had been on standby in the royal waiting room got to work checking that our clothes and makeup were still perfect. A moment later, we heard the prime minister's voice.

"His Majesty the King and Her Majesty the Queen have arrived."

The buzzing hall went silent in an instant as the king and queen straightened up and walked forward. After they went, Lord Glen pulled me close. As I wondered what he was doing, he gave me a tight hug. I could hear his slightly hastened heartbeat as His Majesty gave his greetings.

"Good of you all to come. We have an important announcement to make," the king said before pausing. He must have been looking around the hall at the guests. "My younger brother has himself a fiancée!"

The room buzzed again as soon as the words left his lips.

"Okay, let's go." Loosening his arms from around me, Lord Glen took my hand and led me out.

As we stepped outside of the waiting room and into the hall, I could hear the guests murmuring.

"That's His Highness's fiancée... Who is she?"

"She debuted at the last party, didn't she?"

"She was an acquaintance of Duke Bazrack, was she not?"

Once we'd walked directly beside the royal couple, Lord Glen stopped and looked around the hall. Since we were about five steps higher than those in attendance, even I could see to the corners of the room despite my height.

"Her name is Chelsea, and she is the daughter of Margrave Sargent," Lord Glen announced.

As he spoke, I straightened my back and curtsied. Then Lord Glen's arm

wrapped around my waist and pulled me close. I looked up at him, only to see his enchanting smile get closer as his lips touched my forehead. I felt something soft and warm before he immediately pulled back. The hall's buzz turned to squeals.



Huh? Did he just...kiss me? In front of all of these people?! What?! I could feel my face turning red. I looked down in embarrassment before getting pulled into another hug.

"I did that because I wanted to show you off, but I don't want anyone to see you looking like that. I want to keep that look for myself," he whispered quietly.

I could hear His Majesty chuckle. "I know that some may be against Glenarnold's engagement. But I'd advise you not to get between them," he declared, silencing the room in an instant. "Tonight is a celebration. Enjoy yourselves."

Taking those words as their cue, the orchestra stationed to the side of the hall began playing, and the party began.

Once my cheeks cooled off, Lord Glen loosened his arms and held a hand out to me. "Let's dance."

"All right," I replied, taking his hand as we descended the stairs.

The middle of the hall was left empty for dancing. As soon as the two of us stood on the dance floor, the orchestra started playing a dance tune.

Thanks to Lord Glen telling me over and over again that dancing was supposed to be fun, I wasn't nervous. It actually *was* fun, and and my lips naturally formed a smile. I enjoyed seeing each of my steps line up with Lord Glen's. When he picked me up and spun me around, the feeling of floating was wonderful. Every single part of the dance was just so thrilling, and every time our eyes met, we would smile.

Once we finished the song, I could hear exclamations of wonder as noble couples I didn't even know spoke up about wanting to dance, moving to the middle of the room.

"That shows just how fun your dancing looked," Lord Glen murmured, getting more smiles out of me. "Let's go greet people next."

"Yes!" I replied, pumping myself up with a strong nod before we walked around the hall together.

The room was just filled with aristocrats in their finery, all glancing at us in the

hopes we'd start up a conversation. As a matter of manners in social situations like this, it was considered rude for those of lower rank to speak to those of higher rank. This meant that the king and queen were the only ones who could start up a conversation with Lord Glen, who was both a royal and Duke Snowflake.

And in that situation came Lord Tris, walking in front of us wearing his best.

"Hey, Tris." Lord Glen greeted him casually, just as he usually did.

A grin broke out on the researcher's face, and he said, "Your Highness. Miss Chelsea. Congratulations on your engagement! You finally get to go public, huh?"

We hadn't told Lord Tris about our relationship, since we'd been ordered to keep it a secret until the official announcement. *How did he know?*

As I tilted my head in confusion, Lord Glen asked the exact same thing I was thinking. "You knew?"

Lord Tris shook his head. "Not until a bit ago. But you guys kinda gave off that feeling."

"I can't recall ever doing anything to make it apparent..." Lord Glen murmured, getting a blank look back from Lord Tris.

"Did you not notice yourself? You were always chasing Miss Chelsea with your eyes."

I blinked a few times when he said that. Essentially, he sensed that our engagement wasn't for political reasons.

I glanced over at Lord Glen, and he had a hand to his mouth in embarrassment.

"Miss Chelsea is my research buddy, and also something like a little sister to me too. Treat her well, 'kay?" Lord Tris stared Lord Glen down, looking uncharacteristically serious.

I hadn't known he thought about me like that. Since I was so happy, the words just slipped from my lips. "Should I call you Brother Tris, then?"

He blinked at me for a moment, then blushed and gave me a little smile.

“Marx’d kill me if you did.”

I giggled back, easily imagining how unhappy my older brother would be.

“I’d do what?” Brother Marx himself appeared from behind Lord Tris. Beside him stood a woman with sparkling silver hair.

Is that Brother Marx’s fiancée?

While I wondered, Lord Glen greeted them. “Marx and Baron Talcott’s daughter, huh?”

My brother gave a knightly salute, while Miss Talcott gave a splendid curtsy.

“I’ve come as a representative of the Sargent Margraviate today,” Marx told Lord Glen before turning to me. “This is your first time meeting Stacey, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is.” I nodded.

“She’s Baron Talcott’s daughter, and my fiancée, Stacey.”

“I’m Stacey Talcott. I’m both Lord Marx’s fiancée and his aide.”

“A pleasure to meet you. My name is Chelsea Sargent.”

After introducing ourselves, she gave me a smile. Her slightly droopy azure eyes made her seem so gentle.

“Um... May I call you Elder Sister Stacey?”

Back in the margraviate, I’d called Brother Saix’s fiancée my elder sister, so I asked if I could do the same with her. Lady Stacey’s eyes widened for a moment before a blush and a smile appeared on her face.

“Yes, please do!”

“It’s not very often that I see Stacey this happy about anything,” joked Marx, getting a smile from his fiancée before she reached over, grabbed his side, and twisted.

Unable to scream in the middle of a party, my brother cried voicelessly as he endured it.

Having finished greeting Lord Tris, Brother Marx, and Sister Stacey, the other nobles who had been watching us at a distance started approaching. Lord Glen

gave each and every one a smile and a greeting. I did my best to keep smiling as I introduced myself to them.

Most of the nobles seemed to have debts of gratitude to Lord Glen, thanking him for one thing or another. There were just so many people that I started forgetting who they were halfway through.

When I quietly confessed that to Lord Glen, he gave a wry smile before whispering in my ear, “I forget too sometimes. Then I cheat and use my [Appraisal] Skill.”

I’m so jealous! I thought, glaring up at him.

As we circled around the party hall, we found Marquis Wisteria and Lady Noel.

“It’s been a while, marquis.”

“I’ve heard much about your efforts, Your Highness.”

While the two were talking, I greeted Lady Noel. Even just calling her name brought a big smile to her face. It was cute.

“Lady Chelsea! Congratulations on your engagement! I was so surprised!”

We’d been meeting each other frequently since that incident at the Wisteria Villa, and we’d become quite close.

“We were told to keep it a secret until it was officially announced...”

Even though I talked about practically everything with Lady Noel, I hadn’t told her about our engagement. I’d always felt guilty being unable to tell her.

“We can’t have today’s star looking like that! C’mon, smile, smile!”

My expression softened when she said that.

“Come over to my house again sometime! You can tell me *all* about your love life with His Highness, and how it started!”

“Huh?!” I gasped. *Tell her about my love life?!* Just thinking about it made me blush bright red with embarrassment.

While the two of us were chatting, Lord Glen and Lady Noel’s father finished their conversation as well.

“Let’s get going,” he whispered in my ear, and I nodded back.

Lady Noel, who was standing right in front of me, clasped her hands together as if in prayer. “Lady Chelsea really is just too adorable! It’s healing me!”

I pretended not to hear what she was saying as Lord Glen and I walked away.

The next day, our engagement was announced to the public.

It was common knowledge that the king’s younger brother was incredibly talented, and that His Majesty treasured him. Apparently the citizens had a lot of guesses about what kind of person his fiancée would be.

From what I’d heard, some thought she’d be beautiful but with a horrible personality, leading His Highness around by the nose. Others thought that she could be a really good person who cherished him, or a lady just as talented as him...

All of their guesses were quite different from how I really was, so I was at a loss.

Epilogue

A few days after our engagement announcement, I visited Lord Glen's office in the palace.

Right by the entrance, there was a leather-covered sofa and a big low table for guests, then a wall of bookcases stuffed full of books flanking a stately work desk and an elegant chair. It really gave off the feeling of a real working adult's room, and my heart started pounding as soon as I walked inside...

After we'd been served tea and snacks on the low table, Lord Glen and I sat side-by-side on the sofa.

"I'd like to have our tea parties here in my office on some days. Is that all right?" he asked, sipping at his tea.

"Yes, that's fine with me, but..." I tilted my head in confusion, unsure why he wanted to have our mana pool-increasing tea parties in his office instead of in my lab like we'd always done before.

Lord Glen looked away, covering his mouth and looking a little embarrassed.

He stayed silent for a little while, before the Communication Spirit appeared, sparkling. "He wants you to watch him work and see how coo—"

"Don't go reading my heart like that!" Lord Glen cut the Spirit's words off. Though he wasn't able to see the Spirit, he could still hear it.

"I'd...like to know how you act in different places, as well."

Smiling happily, he replied, "One day...I'd like to invite you to my personal room."

Going to Lord Glen's personal room...?! Lady Noel's room is full of plants. I wonder what his room will be like? Just thinking about it got me excited.

"I'll look forward to that day!" I said, beaming.

Lord Glen looked a bit conflicted with my response. "...It kinda hurts how little you think of me as a man."

“Huh?” He’d spoken so quietly I didn’t catch it.

“Never mind,” he said, shaking his head.

He took me by the hand and guided me to stand. Then he brought me over to the window and hugged me tight from behind.



Reflected in the window glass were my surprised expression and Lord Glen's smile. As I stared absentmindedly at our reflections, he brought his face close to just above my ear and planted a kiss there. I heard a smooch sound before his lips moved away.

"Hweh?!"

I was so surprised by what he'd done that a weird sound escaped my mouth. My face began to redden more and more. I wanted to cover my face with my hands, but I couldn't since he was hugging me from behind. I looked up at Lord Glen, only to see him grinning happily like a little boy whose prank succeeded.

"I can only do this much since we're in my office, but I dunno how far I'd go if we were in my room."

"Ah!"

I finally remembered mother's words when he said that.

"To visit a man's room is to lie with him. I think that His Highness will treasure you, but make sure you're prepared if you're given the chance to visit."

At the time, I wasn't exactly sure what she meant about "lying" with him, but I understood from her expression that visiting his room wasn't something I should do lightly. *And now here I am...!*

I looked up at him in the reflection again, and our eyes met. I realized he'd been watching me the entire time, and I looked away in embarrassment.

We stayed there with him hugging me for a while longer before he murmured, "I can finally show you the sea."

Unsure of what he was talking about so suddenly, I tilted my head a little bit. "The...sea?"

"I promised before that I'd show you the sea, but we never had the chance."

Now that I thought about it, he'd mentioned wanting to take a side trip to show me it while we were on our way to Radzuel. But we hadn't had the time to do so, and I'd forgotten about it completely.

"My domain, the Snowflake Duchy, is on the seaside," he began. The

Snowflake Duchy was in the south of the Kingdom of Chronowize, about the same distance from the capital as the Sargent Margraviate. “If I went anywhere on a long trip alone with a lady before our engagement was announced, people would start spreading rumors, right?”

I nodded.

“Since I’d been told to be good, I’d held things back until the official announcement, but...”

“You mean...”

“Will you come to my territory and the sea with me?”

“Absolutely!” I answered instantly, getting a happy chuckle from Lord Glen behind me.

“I want to introduce the people to the future duchess. I’ll get the plans approved ASAP, so look forward to it.”

“F-Future duchess...?!” I was so happy that I couldn’t help but smile when I heard that he’d already been planning for things after our engagement.

«So this is where you were.»

After we’d moved back to the sofa to chat more, Ele appeared in his cat form. Then he hopped up on the other sofa sandwiching the table.

“Is something the matter?” He’d appeared so suddenly that Lord Glen squared himself off.

I stared at the Spirit too, thinking something must be wrong.

«I just came to tell you that the branch for the cutting is growing,» Ele reported, looking at both of us. I breathed a sigh of relief that it wasn’t any bad news. «It should be ready in two months’ time.»

“Okay. I’ll have to let our destination know.”

After what happened half a year before, Ele had told us he wanted to meet the Proxy and talk. The Proxy, being made to seem as if she were targeting me, lived deep in the Demonic Forest behind a four-layer barrier made by the Great

Spirits.

Unless we got rid of the barrier, Ele wouldn't be able to see the Proxy. And in order to take down said barrier, we'd need to plant cuttings of the Spirit Tree, and summon the Great Spirits from the Spirit World. I was the only one who could plant the cuttings, and due to an ancient restriction, Greater Spirits could only be summoned from cuttings planted about an entire country's distance away from each other.

"Destination? Where will we be headed?" I asked.

"To the Martec Republic, even farther west than Radzuel. They were all for getting a cutting. I figured we could go after stopping to check in on Royz."

The Radzuel Empire was to the west of Chronowize, and its citizens were beastmen who could transform between human form and beast form. Its current emperor was Lord Royz, the dragonman. The Martec Republic was even farther west, and I remembered that it was called "the land of crafting and merchants." Its citizens were elves, dwarves, and a race called grassrunners, who were apparently similar to fairies.

While I was busy remembering what I'd been taught, Lord Glen smiled. "I was thinking we could bring Micah and let her visit home. How about it?"

"That's a wonderful idea."

My personal chef-slash-maid, Micah, was originally from the Radzuel Empire, and was both Emperor Royz's adopted daughter and disciple. The both of them would probably be happy to see each other.

«I'll have the branch put inside of a wooden box after you reach Radzuel, so it may be best to leave a bit earlier than when it's ready.»

I looked at Ele, confused.

«You remember that I must constantly use my magic on the cutting branch in order to prevent it from drying out, as well as to keep it safe, yes?»

I nodded, remembering how Ele had to stay right beside the box when casting his magic, and spending most of the time sleeping because of it.

«Keeping that magic up across two countries is too much for even myself. I

plan on teleporting to the Tree in Radzuel from our Spirit Tree of Origin here to make the distance we must carry the cutting shorter.»

“So, in essence, we’ll only be carrying the cutting from Radzuel to Martec?”

Cat-form Ele nodded. Seeing him nod as a cat was so cute that it made me want to pet him. But unfortunately, he was sitting on the other side of the table, so I couldn’t.

“I’ll get things adjusted for now,” Lord Glen said, planting a kiss on my temple before standing.

“...?!” I squeaked something nearly word-like out and looked over at him, only for him to chuckle and sit down in his desk chair.

«You should do that when you’re alone together...» Ele muttered, fed up before he disappeared.

Ele was sitting right across from us, and Lord Glen k-kissed me! I wanted to complain, but the increasing embarrassment made me cover my heated face with my hands instead.

Side Story

1. Snowflake Duchy

About ten days after our engagement was made public, Lord Glen and I were in a carriage on our way to the Snowflake Duchy.

“After we have our debut feast in the Duchy’s capital, we’ll head to the town of Eins by the sea.”

I nodded along to Lord Glen’s explanation in the swaying carriage before stopping him to ask, “Debut feast...?”

“It’s a festival to introduce my fiancée to the citizens. After greeting everyone on stage in the plaza, we’ll go look at all of the stalls and exhibits around.”

Once, when I was little, I’d snuck a look at a festival from the barony’s manor grounds. I saw people in gorgeous and colorful costumes playing instruments as they walked. The children chasing after them seemed to have a lot of fun, and I remembered being jealous.

Since I’d been adopted by Margrave Sargent, I’d been so busy studying in order to stay with Lord Glen that I wouldn’t have had the time to go to a festival if one had taken place. I’d heard that the royal capital was in festival-mode the day our engagement was made public, but I couldn’t say I wanted to go see it for security reasons.

“It’ll be my first festival. I’m so excited!”

I gave a stronger-than-usual nod, and Lord Glen smiled at me bashfully.

+ + +

During midday, five days after we’d left the royal capital, we finally reached the Snowflake Duchy’s capital. It was up on a hill, with the Duchy’s castle-like consulate at the top. Apparently it also served as the ducal family’s manor.

As we rode through the city, I saw colorful flags decorating the outside walls

of the citizens' homes, beside the shop signs, and on the street lights.

"Those decorations are unique to the Snowflake Duchy," Lord Glen explained while I stared at the colorful fabrics outside of the carriage window. "We put them up when something good happens. Other places have different colors or patterns, while some put nothing up at all."

Looking closer, I could see that they were all made of palm-sized pieces of fabric joined together. *So that's why none of them look the same!*

As I looked around in surprised amazement, we made it to the castle. I took Lord Glen's hand as he helped me out, and we were met by a myriad of differently dressed people all lined up. In the middle was a smiling old man in a butler's uniform, with his dark brown salt-and-pepper hair slicked back.

When we approached the entrance, the line of people split.

"Welcome home, Your Highness. And welcome, Lady Fiancée," said the old man in place of the group. They all bowed their heads.

"I'm home, everyone."

Their heads rose at Lord Glen's reply. They all looked so happy, and I could feel that he was important to all of them. I knew it wasn't something I should be doing to people below my station, but I curtsied back at them in an attempt to show good faith. *Slow and polite, as graceful as I can be...*

The old man smiled, eyes crinkling.

"His name is Sebastian. He's the Snowflake Duchy's acting lord. He's also technically a baron, but he gets cranky if you call him by his full name."

"As His Highness says, my name is Sebastian. Before I was acting lord of the Duchy of Snowflake, I was His Highness's butler. Please, do call me Sebas."

"She's Chelsea, daughter of Margrave Sargent. She's both my fiancée and a research fellow at the Royal Research Institute."

"My name is Chelsea Sargent. Please, call me Chelsea." I introduced myself with a smile, and the old man...Sir Sebas gave me a bright smile back.

"We will call you Lady Chelsea until the day that you two are wed."

All of the other people nodded in agreement.

+ + +

Since Lord Glen and Sir Sebas needed to talk about things related to the duchy, I was shown to my room first. It was a really spacious room on the third floor, in a spot with lots of sunlight. The curtains and carpet were a low-key wine red, with a sofa of the same color.

Huh? I looked all around, but for some reason, there was no bed.

“The bedroom is beyond the door,” said the maid, as if reading my mind.

So it’s split into a room for sleep and a room for play. How fancy!

“Thank you ever so much for showing me to such a wonderful room.”

When I thanked her, the maid blinked a few times in shock. *Did I say something strange?* I tilted my head in confusion, and her expression changed to a smile.

“If you need anything at all, please ask,” she said before standing in wait beside the wall.

I walked over to the window and looked outside. Since the consulate was on the highest point of the hill, I could see the entire ducal capital at once. It was also fun to see the cloth decorating the buildings and street lights from here.

My gaze slowly moved closer to the actual consulate, and the gardens caught my eye. Not only were there flowers, but vegetables growing as well.

Isn’t having plants other than flowers a bit unusual? Since Lord Glen and Sir Sebas’s talk is supposed to take a while, why don’t I go for a little walk?

Curious, I asked the maid waiting off to the side. “Um... Would it be all right if I were to take a walk through the gardens?”

“Yes, of course!” She nodded with a smile.

Strolling down the paths decorated with pansies, petunias, and snapdragons, I walked towards the garden—or rather, the *field*. I reached it after passing under an arch of roses.

“Tomato, basil, lettuce, and these are chili peppers?” I rattled off the names

of plants I'd seen in my book as I slowly walked through the fields.

"My lady, you're familiar with the names of vegetables?" murmured the maid accompanying me in surprise.

"Yes. My research involves plants."

In actuality, it was on my Skill [Seed Creation], but I gave a more general answer since it would take too long to get into detail. The maid seemed to accept it.

All of the vegetables planted around me looked nice and healthy. They reminded me of one time when Lord Tris had said, "*Plants'll get saucy if you forget to take care of them for even a moment,*" so that must have meant that these vegetables were well taken care of.

After looking at all the lively veggie fields, I went back to the path to continue my garden walk. After a short distance, I ended up at the stables. The brown-coated horse that had pulled our carriage was right near the entrance, so I walked up to it.

"My lady, you mustn't get so close," warned the maid, looking nervous.

Normally, a horse might get defensive and act violently when someone they didn't know approached, but...

"This one is fine."

When I held out my hand, the horse moved its head and nestled against my palm of its own accord. I'd actually had a few conversations with the cart horse via the Communication Spirit during our journey to the duchy. I'd also given it an Aopo Seed when it was tired, so we were fairly friendly.

"No way any lady who's friendly with a horse could be bad," said the old stablehand brusquely as he walked out from within the stable, giving me a smirk.

The maid accompanying me looked surprised again. *I wonder why she's getting so surprised?* I was curious, but not curious enough to ask.

Once my walk was finished and I'd returned to my room, I was told it was

time for dinner. After checking to make sure I looked all right, the maid led me to the dining room.

Inside, Lord Glen was already sitting. He beckoned me over, urging me to sit down at the seat beside him.

From an etiquette standpoint, I should sit across from him, but...

"It seems that you're troubling Lady Chelsea," chided Sir Sebas for me, but Lord Glen just shook his head.

"This isn't a formal dinner, and there's no one here I wouldn't want to see us, so sitting side by side should be fine. Sit beside me, okay, Chelsea?"

He was smiling so happily that I just had to nod obediently.

"All right," I said, sitting in the seat beside him.

For some reason, I could feel the gazes of Sir Sebas, the maid who accompanied me, and the servants who brought the food out. *Sort of amazed, sort of surprised...* Their expressions put me at a loss.

Our dinner was a dish made with the Snowflake Duchy's local specialty beef. On top of a hot steel plate was a delicious-smelling hamburger steak that was easily cut, spilling out its juices. I lifted it to my mouth and took a bite. It was soft, juicy, and delicious.

+ + +

Once I was fresh out of the bath, I headed to the master bedroom.

As I walked in, the first thing I saw was the huge bed. It was probably big enough to fit five adults, if not more. In the middle of the room was a three-seat sofa and a low table, so I went to sit down for the time being.

When I sat on the soft cloth sofa cushion, I bounced a bit. *This is kinda fun...!*

After bouncing a few times, I heard a knock on the door. It seemed that the main bedroom was connected to the hallway.

"I've brought you your evening snack."

I recognized the voice as Sir Sebas, so I let him in. A maid pushing a cart came in as well, setting some fruit water and bite-sized chocolate on a little plate out

onto the low table.

“Have a wonderful evening,” Sir Sebas said, as he and the maid left the room.

I took a sip of my fruit water before reaching out for the sweet-smelling chocolates. When I bit into one, a sweet liquid seeped out of the middle and spread through my mouth. As the sweetness subsided, there was a slightly bitter aftertaste. I’d never had anything like this before. Aside from the taste, the chocolate made me feel like I was floating.

“Yummy...”

I grabbed another and put it in my mouth. Then another. I was so entranced by the sweet liquid that I had eaten half of the plate before I realized what I was doing.

“I wanna eat more...but I want Lord Glen to have some too...”

As soon as the words left my mouth, I heard a door open. I looked towards the hallway entrance, but no one was there. The lack of anyone puzzled me, but before I could think much about it, I heard someone approaching from the other direction.

“Chelsea?”

“Huh? Lord Glen?”

I tilted my head while he blinked at me.

“Is somethin’ wrong?” I giggled as a smile spread over my face. *Huh? The floaty feeling is making it hard to talk.*

Lord Glen’s gaze fell to the table. “Are you...?!”

He looks so handsome, suddenly grabbing a chocolate and throwing it in his mouth...

While I was busy thinking that, he swallowed and then held his head in his hands. “These are liqueur chocolates...”

I heard him saying something, but I wasn’t comprehending anything. Everything felt so floaty. I reached out for another chocolate. Just as I was about to put it in my mouth, Lord Glen grabbed my wrist.

“No more for you.”

“Why...?” I asked, tilting my head again as he looked away. *They’re so good... I wanna eat more...*

Looking at the plate, I remembered that I’d eaten about half of them.

“Oh... So we were splitting them.” He must have said no because the rest were his.

“No, that’s not...” he mumbled as I nodded to myself.

I don’t really get it, but if half of them are his, I need him to eat them...

“Lord Glen, say ‘ahhh!’” I said, still feeling floaty.

His hand left my wrist, and he finally looked at my face, blinking again.

“Ahhhh~ Say ‘ahhh~’” I repeated, bringing the chocolate to his lips. He swallowed hard before slowly opening his mouth. “Here you go!”

I tossed the chocolate in. *He’s so cute, chewing it up... I want to feed him more...!*

“Lord Glen, come sit right here!” I urged him, smacking the seat beside me. He sat down, blushing a little bit.

Once I was sure he was sitting, I picked up another piece of chocolate and lifted it to his lips. Though he looked embarrassed, Lord Glen opened his mouth and ate it for me.

Before I knew it...all of the chocolates were gone.

+ + +

I woke up to the sunlight flickering in through the gaps in the curtains. Looking up at the unfamiliar ceiling, I remembered that this was the master bedroom in the Snowflake ducal manor.

Huh? When did I fall asleep? I had no memories after I started eating the chocolates. *Wait... I think I remember Lord Glen being there. But when did I get in bed?*

Confused, I sat myself up. I looked around before my eyes drifted to the other side of the bed. There I saw dark-blue hair at the very, very edge, nearly falling

off. Timidly, I leaned closer, only to see Lord Glen sleeping.

Long eyelashes, the same color as his hair... A well-shaped nose. Thin lips. He really is just as beautiful as an angel. I couldn't help but stare.

But as I sat there blankly looking at him, I realized: *Why is...Lord Glen here?*

"Huh?!" I squealed in surprise.

When I did, his eyes opened, our gazes met, and I froze up. After blinking a few times, he sat up and chuckled.

"Good morning, Chelsea."

While I was busy flapping my gums in confusion, he just stretched.

Interlude: Glen

After she made me eat all of the liqueur chocolates on the plate, Chelsea stared at my face, smiling happily with intoxicated eyes. I don't think I could be blamed for getting embarrassed after how long she did it.

"Chelsea?"

"Yes?"

"It's kinda embarrassing having you stare like that," I said honestly.

She blinked a few times.

"Your face is just as pretty as an angel's; I can't help it," she said, smiling again.

I could feel my face heating up from her defenseless smile. I *really* wanted to hug her, right then.

Blissfully ignorant to my thoughts, she asked in a more relaxed voice than usual, "Anyway... Why are you here, Lord Glen?"

"This is my room... Why are *you* here?"

I realized as soon as the words left my lips. This was the main bedroom, where the current Duke and Duchess Snowflake would sleep together. It was connected to both of their private quarters.

I was the current Duke Snowflake, so setting that aside...Chelsea must have been taken to the duchess's room, despite us not being married yet. It wasn't odd that she would use it as the future Duchess Snowflake, but...it was *way* too early for us to be sleeping in the same bed.

"I understand. This is *your* room. I'll sleep somewhere else!"

She got up and started walking away, but ended up flopping down on the sofa again.

"Huh?" Apparently she was even drunker than I thought.

"You're not getting anywhere in your current state. I'll sleep somewhere else."

"No!" Chelsea refused strongly, shaking her head side to side. I froze, wondering what she was doing. "This is Lord Glen's room. *I'll* go."

Despite her assertion, she was too drunk to even stand up.

After looking back and forth between her and the bed, I muttered, "Okay... We'll sleep on the bed together."

"Together?" she asked, tilting her head.

She was so cute that I couldn't help but reach out and touch her cheek.

"Your hand is warm, Lord Glen." She smiled again, nuzzling against my palm. I had to hold myself back from doing something else with how defenseless she was.

No making a move on a woman until you're married. I resisted my urges, repeating that in my head. Things weren't as relaxed here as in my past life.

"That bed should be fine as long as we sleep to the sides."

"That's true! It's a huge bed!" Chelsea laughed happily.

Seeing as she couldn't stand on her own, I picked her up and took her over to the bed. Her arms naturally circled my neck to keep herself from falling. My heart began to race at the fact that we were practically holding each other.

Heart still pounding, I laid her down more to the middle of the bed, since I was worried she might fall off at the edge. She let go as I did, looking up at me

with drunk eyes.

I wasn't doing a single thing wrong, but I felt like I was gonna end up feeling guilty anyway.

"C'mon, close your eyes."

I lightly covered her eyes with my palm, and when I pulled it back a moment later, her eyes were closed and she was breathing steadily.

I admired her sleeping face for a few moments before getting into the other side of the bed. Thinking back, I must have been a little drunk on the chocolates too. Otherwise, I would never have suggested sleeping together in the same bed.

The next morning, I woke to Chelsea's shocked cry. Her clothes weren't messed up, and I hadn't moved from where I'd lain down. Even though we were engaged, I was relieved to know I hadn't imposed myself on an unmarried, underage girl.

"Good morning, Chelsea."

She was cute when she was drunk last night, but she was cute frozen like this too. And from how she was acting, it seemed like she might not remember what happened the night before.

Now, how am I gonna explain this to her? I thought, chuckling.

2. The Festival in the Duchy's Capital

When I woke up, Lord Glen was sleeping in the same bed. I was super shocked, but he just chuckled.

"This is the master bedroom for the duke and duchess... Meaning, for me and the future duchess, who is you. That's why it's okay for us to sleep in the same bed," he explained, slipping out and onto his feet.

It seemed like nothing had occurred, but there was something I wondered about.

“Um... I don’t remember anything that happened after eating the chocolates,” I confessed, using every bit of courage I had. “I didn’t do anything rude, did I...?”

Lord Glen shook his head. “The chocolates you ate last night had liqueur in them. You got drunk and fell asleep pretty fast, so you didn’t do anything rude at all.”

“I see,” I replied with a sigh. *That’s a relief.*

+ + +

Once we had a light lunch, the maids helped me into a dress that was visually extravagant, but easy to move in and without a corset. Apparently it was chosen so that we could go look around the stalls and exhibits after I greeted the people as Lord Glen’s fiancée.

If I’m in this, walking for a long time won’t tire me out!

After giving my thanks to the head maid who’d chosen the dress, Lord Glen and I got into the carriage. The greeting would be held in the plaza near the center of the capital, and as we traveled from the manor, I could see lots of people.

We got out of the carriage partway through. During the celebration, travel by carriage was restricted around the plaza for everyone’s safety. From there we headed to the stage deeper in.

Heart pounding, I walked on stage with Lord Glen and stood in the middle. I knew everyone’s eyes were on us.

Lord Glen greeted them as duke, then looked over at me. “This is my fiancée, Lady Chelsea, daughter of Margrave Sargent.”

“My name is Chelsea Sargent... Please, everyone, do treat me well.”

I was so nervous that I couldn’t squeeze anything but that out. Despite this though, the citizens clapped and cheered. *Everyone back in the Sargent Margraviate is nice, so maybe everyone here in the Snowflake Duchy is nice too.* When I thought that, a smile came to my face naturally.

Once we were done with our introductions, the two of us descended from the

stage and started visiting the stalls. I was so excited to finally experience a festival that I nearly started running, but I held myself back because of all the eyes watching me.

Lord Glen noticed, and he gave my hand a tight squeeze.

“Looks like you might go flying off somewhere if I don’t hold you down here,” he whispered in my ear with a chuckle. My heart was pounding too much to respond verbally, so I just squeezed his hand back.

After that, he didn’t say another word and just started walking.

The first thing we came across was a strange performance called toss juggling, where the performer threw multiple things into the air and caught them over and over again. The man in his feathery hat threw palm-sized balls up in the air one by one before catching them in his opposite hand and tossing them once more. Before I knew it, there were five balls in the air at once, and everyone was cheering.

Just watching the man tossing the balls with great timing was fun. I was mystified by how he didn’t drop any.

“Is he using magic or a Skill?” I asked Lord Glen quietly.

He shook his head. “Some people fake it using magic or Skills, but this man isn’t. He’s doing it out of pure technique,” he said while using his Sage-level [Appraisal] Skill.

It seemed that the performer heard him. He didn’t say anything, but his expression brightened as he kept throwing his balls.

“I’m getting a bit hungry. Let’s look around the stalls.”

I nodded back at Lord Glen’s suggestion. Holding hands, we headed towards the food stalls, and I smelled something delicious.

“That smells sweet... What’s this?” I asked, looking at fruit and cream rolled up on a thin layer of batter.

“These are crepes,” Lord Glen explained, buying one with plenty of fruit. “You don’t rip these up. Instead, you bite into them as is.”

So I have to do the thing that my table manners taught me to never, ever do?!

Despite my shock, I did as he instructed and bit into it. A bit of cream popped out of the side and onto my cheek, which Lord Glen promptly wiped off with a finger before licking it.

“Sweet and delicious.”

Everyone around us was buzzing, but none of it reached my ears. I was mortified—both by the fact I got cream on my face like a little kid, and that Lord Glen had to wipe it off! I was so embarrassed that I considered not eating anymore.

Other than that, we snacked on lots of things, like fried donuts, fruit skewers, sandwiches, and hot dogs. Once we were full and had a little break, we moved on to the shop stalls that were all lined up.

There were shops with tables full of hair decorations, shops with animal-shaped dolls and clothes for those dolls to wear, and shops with old books. It was fun seeing all of the different things for sale.

I stopped in front of one shop selling ornaments with magic stones attached. *They have hand mirrors...*

After I looked at one for a few moments, a big dog popped its head out from under the table. It sat down right beside me, tail wagging as it nudged at my dress with its nose.

“Oh my, how rare for her to warm up to someone,” the shop owner said.

I knelt down and put my palm out, only for the pup to rest her chin there, as if to say, “Please pet me.”

“May I pet her?”

“As much as you’d like!”

After getting permission from the shop owner, I scratched the dog’s chin and neck. It was then that the Communication Spirit appeared.

«It’s sayin’ that Lady Chelsea smells like a nice girl!»

I wonder what a nice person smells like? I tilted my head, but the Spirit didn’t say anything else and flew off somewhere.

While I was busy petting the dog, Lord Glen thanked the shop owner after apparently buying something.

“We’ve been around the whole plaza, it seems. Let’s get going.”

“All right,” I agreed, following him back to the carriage on the main road.

As I watched the townscape and citizens through the little window, Lord Glen took out a paper bag.

“I bought you a present. Open it!”

I did as he instructed and found the hand mirror with magic stones on it that I’d been looking at before.

“This mirror is special,” he said, smirking like a child about to pull a prank. “Try pressing the stone on the back.”

I nervously did, only for the edges of the mirror to light up.

“Hwah?!”

“Those are made so ladies can fix their make-up, even in darker places.”

“It’s handy how it can be both a mirror and a light,” I commented as I looked it over.

Lord Glen smiled. “Do you like it?”

“Yes, very much!” I decided to put it in my storage room in the Spirit World so that I could take it out whenever I wanted.

That night, Lord Glen and I slept in the same bed again, but I fell asleep instantly thanks to all the walking we’d done.

The next morning, Lord Glen looked exhausted.

“Oh no, did I keep you awake by moving or talking too much in my sleep?” I asked worriedly.

“It’s fine,” he said, shaking his head. “You were just as quiet sleeping as you are when you’re up.”

Does that mean he watched me sleeping? I was too embarrassed to ask.

3. The Seaside Town of Eins

We left the duchy's capital the day after the festival, and three days later, we were nearing the seaside town of Eins.

Eins was one of the top two flourishing towns in the Snowflake Duchy, and both the marine products they fished from the sea and the Shine Muscat grapes they grew on land were apparently delicious.

“Once we get over this hill, you’ll be able to see the ocean.”

Listening to Lord Glen, I stared out the little carriage window. Once we were at the top, I saw the water sparkling in the distance. I’d heard about the ocean, but I hadn’t expected it to be so big and sparkling.

“It’s so...pretty...” It was so huge and beautiful that I was at a loss for words.



Thinking back, I'd heard that my adoptive father said that the Blue Lilies blooming looked like the ocean. I'd also thought that the field of Sky Lilies reminded me of the sky. If we planted both, would they look just like the view I was seeing now?

I stared at the sea, but something in front of it caught my eye. Really big and blue somethings, walking sideways towards the grapevines on the coast. They had round bodies, two big scissor claws, and four legs on each side of their body. It appeared that they were rushing fast through the netting and wooden walls between them and their destination. Past that was a big group of people with weapons raised.

"Um, Lord Glen... People are battling some blue creatures."

Hearing my question, he leaned over me from behind to look through the window. My heart jumped smelling the sweet scent coming off of him.

"From what I can see, they're monsters called Muscat Crabs. As per their name, their favorite food is grapes, and they seem to be targeting the Shine Muscats on the coast," Lord Glen explained, giving a sign to the carriage driver to speed up.

We watched through the window, seeing the armed people fighting the human-sized Muscat Crabs as if they were used to it. By the time we arrived, the monsters were all defeated.

"We got a good haul tonight!" The armed crowd cheered.

Then the same people who had fought started cutting up the Muscat Crabs. As they did, a great amount of liquid flowed out of the crabs. It was apparently unneeded since they just let it soak the ground. Once the liquid was drained, they separated the crabs' bodies from their shells, then loaded them onto carts to take somewhere else.

"I hadn't heard any reports of monsters... What's happening?" muttered Lord Glen inside the carriage, hand to his chin and a grim look on his face.

After that, we headed straight for the mayor's home.

"We've got an inn prepared elsewhere for us to relax in. Let's just greet the

mayor first,” said Lord Glen before we stepped out of the carriage.

In front of the mayor’s home was a man with a tough-looking face with a scar on it, smiling at us. “Welcome, Your Excellency, Duke Snowflake!”

“I’ve brought my fiancée mainly for sightseeing, but...” Lord Glen immediately asked about the monsters.

“I will explain that inside,” the tough-looking man—or rather, the mayor—said, leading us to his manor’s parlor.

Lord Glen and I sat down next to each other on a big three-seat sofa, while tea and baked sweets were put out on the low table.

“Those crab monsters have been showing up for the last month or so now,” said the mayor, sipping his tea.

He explained that the Muscat Crabs had washed up and settled on an island off the coast more than half a year before. Initially, they’d been left alone since they weren’t causing any trouble, but that seemed to change recently.

“Why did you not send a report on the monsters?”

“That’s because the fishermen have been vanqui— I mean, hunting them.”

So the people with weapons were fishermen. They had looked really used to beating the Muscat Crabs.

“They said something about getting a big haul.”

“Though the Muscat Crabs are monsters, their meat is incredibly delicious, and their shells can be made into armor. I didn’t report on them since we could manage the situation ourselves. I apologize,” the mayor explained, bowing down.

“It’s not too late. Please, tell us where and how often they appear.”

As Lord Glen was talking, I was staring at a Muscat Crab carapace decorating the room. It was big enough for someone to hide in, and sparkled a special shade of blue different from both the sea and the sky.

“They’ve been appearing once every two or three days, in numbers ranging from a single crab to five at most. They come from the sea to target the Shine

Muscats,” the mayor told us, looking up in thought.

“And they’re being taken out around the grapevines?”

I remembered how the fishermen cut one up right beside some withered grapevines.

“Yes, they are.”

“I’d like to go see.”

“I’ll bring you right there!” The mayor stood up at Lord Glen’s words.

“Chelsea... I know we just got here, but would you mind coming along?”

“All right.” I gave Lord Glen a firm nod.

This was a job for Duke Snowflake. As his fiancée and future duchess, it was probably better for me to go too rather than just stay in my room.

We headed to the withered grapevines in our carriage, stopping it on the road so we could go out and inspect the field. The closer to the sea the grapes got, the more withered they became. Even the ones far away didn’t look too good.

Lord Glen let go of my hand and squatted down to look at the ground. “I just used my [Appraisal] Skill, but this entire area is damaged by salt.”

“What do you mean ‘damaged’?” I asked.

“There are some exceptions, but most plants won’t grow in places with too much salt.”

Seawater was salty. I knew this because I’d heard that licking it tasted really bitter. And here, it didn’t help that big ocean monsters were coming up on land, and were then cut apart after being defeated.

“It seems that every time the crabs are killed, they let out tons of incredibly salty water, which is affecting the Shine Muscats.”

“I have had reports lately from the farmers saying that the grape harvest was suffering,” the mayor said, looking at the grape fields in shock.

“So the salt damage has just started to take effect.”

The mayor nodded.

After that, we looked around for a while before finishing our inspection. On the way back, Lord Glen instructed the mayor to write a report before we parted ways.

+ + +

We finally made it to our intended destination, the inn. The one Lord Glen reserved was right beside the ocean, with the sandy beach right below it.

“Let’s rest for today. Wanna walk along the beach tomorrow?”

The maids back at the ducal house told me that you could do something called “beachcombing” here, where you pick up shells, rocks, and driftwood that the tide brought in. Apparently it was incredibly fun.

“Yes, of course!” I nodded, and Lord Glen chuckled happily at my answer.

Led by an employee of the inn, we were brought to a large room deep within the first floor. They opened the door for us, and I could see a myriad of furniture within. There were two big beds on the left side, with a dining table just to the right of the entrance; further in were a sofa and a low table.

“Please, feel as if you are at home,” said the employee before leaving.

I’d traveled with a carriage a number of times before, but this was the first time I’d stayed in such a magnificent hotel room. *Since there’s a dining table, we’ll probably be eating here...* I was shocked, since I’d only ever been to inns where the rooms were on the second or third floor with the first reserved for eating.

“This inn caters to nobles and royalty.”

“So that’s why it’s so fancy.”

“It’s got a barrier and security, so it’s safer here than if we’d stayed with the mayor,” Lord Glen explained.

I gave him a few nods back in understanding.

Looking at the sunset through the window, he continued, “Since we went to inspect the fields, it’s already nearly time for dinner.”

As the sun set on the horizon, it was reflected in the ocean, looking long and

thin. While I was enthralled with my first ever view of a seaside sunset, someone knocked on the door, and a man in a chef's hat stepped inside.

"May I bring your dinner in for you?"

"Please."

After Lord Glen answered, men and women pushing carts started coming through the door one after the other. Once everything was put on the table, the man in the chef's hat bowed, and the entire group left the room.

"Let's eat."

Lord Glen took my hand and led me to the table, where we sat across from each other.

"Amazing... The tableware is embedded with magical stones to keep the food the temperature it was finished at. Hot food stays piping hot until you take it off the plate, and cold stuff stays cold."

I looked at all the food on the table in surprise, while he looked at a note left on the table.

"Next to the cutlery is an aperitif of white wine. There's only a small amount, but you shouldn't drink it since you might get drunk."

"All right," I nodded, thinking back to my mistake at the ducal manor. If chocolate liqueurs were enough to make me so drunk I couldn't remember anything, it would be best for me not to drink any alcohol at all.

"Chilled pumpkin soup, shrimp terrine, roasted duck breast, scallops and shrimp grilled in salt, flounder carpaccio..."

The pumpkin soup was in a cute bowl shaped like a flower, with parsley sprinkled on top; the terrine and roast were all in bite-sized pieces on a single plate.

"Crab-cream croquette, crab gratin, grilled crab... This is all from those Muscat Crabs."

The crab-cream croquettes were steaming in their brown batter. There was lightly charred cheese sizzling around the edge of the plate the crab gratin was on. It looked really delicious. The grilled crab was simply grilled.

“Seems like there’s dessert afterwards too. Let’s start.”

“Yes!”

I clasped my hands together and said a prayer to the earth gods.

“Thank you for the food,” Lord Glen murmured.

“Thank you for the food,” I murmured at the same time, getting a happy smile back from him.

4. How to Deal with Salt Damage and Monsters

After we finished eating and were lounging on the couch, Lord Glen was staring out the window.

“Is something the matter?” I asked, following his gaze out.

“I was just remembering what happened earlier,” he said, looking apologetic. “Going on inspections and thinking about the duchy while we’re on vacation... I know I shouldn’t, but I just can’t help thinking about it.”

I shook my head. “I don’t mind going out on inspections during our vacation. Rather, I’m happy that you’d bring me.”

Lord Glen was the King of Chronowize’s younger brother and the current Duke Snowflake. Not only that, but he acted as an advisor to the nobility, and worked as an appraiser at the same time. Though we were engaged, he was taking me on a vacation when he shouldn’t have had that much time to spend on me. I was nothing but glad for it.

“And...I will eventually be living here.”

Once I became duchess, I would be living in the Snowflake Duchy. The cheers and applause I was given when I was introduced in the capital were all heartwarming.

“I want to think more about the people of the Snowflake Duchy as well...” I said, pouring my heart out.

Lord Glen put a hand to his mouth, smiling happily. “Then let’s think together.”

“Yes!”

“The gist of it is like this...” he started, pulling paper and a pen out of his Item Box and writing:

Before the Muscat Crabs appeared.

Fishermen: Able to fish enough to get by.

Farmers: Making huge profits from selling Shine Muscat grapes to the royal family.

After the Muscat Crabs appeared.

Fishermen: Making huge profits from selling Muscat Crab meat and carapaces.

Farmers: Grape production output lowered by withering plants. Flavor suffering in remaining plants, and sales dropping.

“As you can see, the fishermen and farmers’ financial situations have reversed after the crabs appeared.”

Because of the abundance of salt, the damages to the Shine Muscat vineyards kept worsening. Not only were sales dropping, but the fields would inevitably end up not producing anything at all.

I nodded, remembering the plants withering from the salt damage. *The farmers putting their all into growing the grapes must feel sad.*

“The farmers are suffering damages. The fact that only fishermen are prospering now will probably end in some hostility towards them. There’s a chance that conflict will erupt if this prolongs.”

My expression warped at Lord Glen’s explanation. “If only both sides made huge profits. Revenue would soar, and the duchy would prosper...”

Lord Glen suddenly looked as if he realized something. “With your [Seed Creation] Skill, we might be able to do just that.”

“Really?!” I looked up at him.

If I could help not only Lord Glen, but the duchy as well, I'd do whatever I could.

"There are two things we need to do. First, stop the Muscat Crabs from going to the vineyards."

"So... You mean we'd be luring them somewhere else?"

"Exactly." He nodded. "We just have to make a grape they'd like more than the Shine Muscats."

Normally, monsters attacked humans because they amassed mana. But when they had a favorite food, they would ignore humans in favor of eating. Back when a monster whose favorite food was liquorice plant appeared, we were able to stall it by planting liquorice seeds. All we had to do was make something that would be at the top of their list of favorite foods and make them eat that instead.

"Second, we'll need to reverse the salt damage to the withering Shine Muscat vineyards," Lord Glen continued, smiling bitterly. "Salt damage is a real pain, and sometimes it takes from a few years to a few decades to remove the salt content from the ground."

If the vineyards stayed withered for that long, the farmers would lose their livelihoods.

"I'm thinking you could make a seed that could immediately remove—no, collect the salt content in the ground."

My Skill allowed me to make any seed I wished for. All I needed to do was wish.

"Understood. I'll make two types of seeds."

And thus began our process of trial and error...

"We should lead the Muscat Crabs to the beach. That means we'll need to use plants that can grow in the sand as reference to make a grape tree."

Plants that can grow in the sand...? I opened my plant book to the page on coconut palm trees.

"I see, palm trees, huh... How about we make them a bit shorter, with grapes

growing instead of coconuts?”

“Should the grapes be the same size as the Shine Muscats?” I asked.

“Nah, let’s make a single orange-sized one. If we make them hard for the crabs to grab and take longer to eat, it’ll buy more time for the fishermen to defeat them.”

“All right.”

With that, we thought up a new seed for a tree that would lure the Muscat Crabs away.

Strengthening the image in my mind, I cast my Skill. “Make a seed for a tree with grapes that the Muscat Crabs will love, and can grow on the beach—[Seed Creation]!”

With a little pop, a round green seed the size of my palm appeared in front of me.

“The seed looks like a cross between a coconut and a Shine Muscat,” commented Lord Glen before using his [Appraisal] Skill to check it out. “It’s called a ‘Wonderly Grape,’ and it’s the Muscat Crab’s favorite food. Seems that it doesn’t taste good to humans.”

“That means people won’t eat them all then,” I said, using my Skill to make ten seeds total.

“Next up is a plant to collect the salt in the ground...”

“Since we can’t think of any plants to base it on, we’ll need to draw up a blueprint,” I said, wishing for a pen and paper back from my Spirit World storage via the bracelet on my left wrist.

“They’ll be planted right beside the withering plants. If they’re too tall, they might end up impeding the grapevine’s growth.”

“Perhaps a shrub would work... Or maybe a type of short grass.” I wrote down “short plant” on the paper. “If they’ll be sucking up the salt, should they have thick roots?”

“Thick would be good, but since we don’t know how deep the salt has saturated, it might also be good to make them grow deep, like dandelions.”

I flipped to the page on dandelions in my book and saw that their roots were both thick and long.

Glen added, "If they're gathering the salt, why don't we make it so they produce fruit made of salt?"

"Maybe fruit that contains the salt..." I jotted that down on the paper.

"By the way, what do you think of salt as, Chelsea?"

"Whitish granulated powder... Is there some other kind?"

When I asked, Lord Glen explained how there was both salt made from the ocean and salt acquired by mining.

"If the salt is coming from sea monsters, then it'll probably be the same as sea salt, right?"

White salt turning into a fruit... When I thought that, a plant immediately sprung to mind. I opened my book to it and showed Lord Glen.

"What if we made it produce pure white eggplant-like fruit?" I asked.

"That's a good idea. Easy to think of."

I wrote down "white eggplant-like salt fruit tree." After that, we decided that it would only leave one seed when withering to keep it from affecting other plants, and that the salt fruits would be hard like walnuts, needing a hammer or something to break open.

Looking over our blueprint again, I strengthened the image of it in my head. "I'll make a seed for a salt fruit plant that follows the blueprint I made with Lord Glen exactly—[Seed Creation!]!"

With another pop, a pure white seed the size of a piece of candy appeared. I immediately showed it to Lord Glen, who appraised it.

"It's called a 'Salt Egg Seed.' It produces fruit filled with sea salt. Since the husk is hard, it's good for using in long-term storage. You made something really interesting," he said, smirking. Sometimes, he smiled just like a little kid before a prank. *He rarely showed me those smiles before, so it might be proof that he trusts me.*

After that, I made a total of ten Salt Egg seeds too.

“Tomorrow, we’ll get the mayor and go plant them.”

“All right.”

And with that, our first night in the seaside town of Eins was over.

+ + +

When I woke up the next morning, the sky was clear and birds soared above the sea.

Apparently we were having breakfast in our room as well, so after we told the staff we were awake, they brought out the warm food. *The potage soup is so warm; it’s like my body is absorbing it.* After thinking that, our breakfast was done.

“The mayor has business this morning, so we’ll head over after noon.”

“Then can we try beachcombing this morning?” I asked excitedly, getting a nod and a gentle smile back.

The beach wasn’t ten steps from the inn.

“It really was close,” I commented, standing on the very edge of the grass before taking a step onto the beach. I was shocked at how different the sensation was compared to dirt in the fields. When I walked a bit further, I understood what the maids had meant by the sand being difficult to walk properly on. “So this is a beach!”

Lord Glen chuckled as I had fun walking back and forth. “I’m glad you like it. Let’s get a bit closer to the water so we can beachcomb.”

Holding hands, we slowly approached the water’s edge. As I watched the waves come and go, I saw something white and closed in on it. Lord Glen must have used his [Appraisal] Skill, because while he laughed, he didn’t say anything else.

Pumping myself up, I picked up my first find of our beachcombing... a white, broken shell.

“Aww...”

“From what I know of beachcombing, you rarely find anything good.”

“I won’t give up though,” I declared to him, letting go of his hand and wandering the beach.

After a while, he started as well, bending down to pick something up.

We continued to search until lunch. *Unfortunately, the only things I was able to find were broken shells...* As I slumped in disappointment, Lord Glen walked up in front of me.

“Here, you can have this,” he said, handing me a light pink shell.

“It’s so cute!”

Since I figured I’d lose them otherwise, I gathered Glen’s shell and my broken shells together and sent them to my storage in the Spirit World.

+ + +

Once afternoon came around, we headed for the mayor’s house, where a lady representing the farmers and a man representing the fishermen were waiting.

“They wanted to argue their cases, no matter what...” explained the scary-faced mayor.

“I’ll hear them out while we head to where the Muscat Crabs were defeated,” Lord Glen conceded, prompting the farmer lady to speak.

“When the monsters first started appearin’, they were eatin’ the grapes closest to shore...” Apparently the damage sustained wasn’t very bad, but they were giving up on those plants. “Then the fishers came’n said they’d beat’em.”

The fishermen had realized that the crabs wouldn’t counterattack while they were eating the grapes, so the fishermen used that opportunity to defeat them.

“The fishermen killed ‘em all. But while we were relieved then, the vines started witherin’.”

The amount the monsters had been eating was negligible. But when the vines themselves started to decay, they stopped producing fruit, and the farmers couldn’t go on.

“That’s why we want ‘em to stop killin’ the monsters.”

“We can’t stop! If we don’t kill ‘em, they’ll multiply!” the fisherman countered her. “Ye can only handle the amount they’re eatin’ ‘cause there are only a few. If they multiply, witherin’ plants’ll be the least of yer problems!”

“C-Calm down.” The mayor got in between the two, gesturing down with his hands, but they kept arguing for and against defeating the monsters.

“I understand both the farmers’ and fishers’ points of view as the lord,” Lord Glen said, finally quieting the two.

A few minutes later, we arrived at the spot where the Muscat Crabs had been defeated, and where the Shine Muscat vines were withering from salt damage.

“Last night, I discussed the issues with my fiancée here, and we’ve thought of a solution,” Lord Glen declared to the group as soon as we arrived.

The mayor cocked his head to the side, while the fisherman and farmer woman looked shocked simultaneously. *They kind of look alike.*

“Ah, I haven’t introduced her, have I? This is Chelsea, daughter of Margrave Sargent. She is my fiancée, as well as a research fellow at the Royal Research Institute.”

“My name is Chelsea Sargent. My research mostly involves plants,” I said, introducing myself the same way that I did to the ducal manor’s maids, and getting a shocked look from the mayor as I did.

“Let’s plant the seeds now, Chelsea.”

“Yes,” I replied, willing a single Salt Egg Seed back from my Spirit World storage. Then I pushed it into the soil where Lord Glen pointed.

The candy-sized Salt Egg Seed immediately sprouted, growing quickly up to my waist and blooming white flowers. The flowers then became a white eggplant-like fruit. It all happened so fast that the mayor and the two representatives were frozen in shock.

After giving the Salt Egg seedling a good look-over, Lord Glen pulled off the fruit. It rattled when he shook it, and sounded hard when he lightly hit it with his knuckles.

“This is a plant called a ‘Salt Egg,’ and it gathers salt from the ground, then makes it into a fruit. We’ll plant these uniformly in the salt-damaged ground.”

“What is inside of the fruit?” the mayor asked in surprise.

“Let’s check,” Lord Glen said, getting a hammer from his Item Box and lightly hitting the Salt Egg fruit in his hand with it.

A crack formed after a few hits, and it broke like an egg. Inside was rough whitish powder.

“[Appraisal] confirms it’s sea salt,” he continued, taking a pinch and eating it. He urged the mayor and the others to follow suit. I tasted it as well.

“That is indeed salt.” The mayor nodded.

After that, I took all of the other Salt Egg Seeds that I had out of my storage and handed them to Lord Glen, the mayor, and our guards. They all timidly fanned out and planted their respective seeds.

“Once they collect a certain amount of salt, they’ll wilt and leave a single seed. Make sure to then plant that seed in another patch of salt-damaged earth.”

The mayor and the farmer woman bowed their heads to Lord Glen’s words.

Next, we headed to a patch of beach on the edge of town, where people didn’t normally go.

“Wh-What will we be doing here?” the mayor asked curiously, looking around.

“We’re making sure that the Muscat Crabs won’t target the Shine Muscats anymore. Chelsea, if you would.”

“Yes.”

This time, I took my Wonderly Grape Seeds from my Spirit World storage and planted one in the sand. It too sprouted and grew in an instant.

It was about the same height as two adults. And a bit lower than the height coconuts would grow—or the height the crabs would barely be able to reach with their pincers—were grapes about as big as an orange.

“This is a Wonderly Grape tree, which grows grapes that the Muscat Crabs love. Please be aware that they do not taste good to humans,” I explained, planting them at regular intervals in the sand.

While I was in the middle of planting, a Muscat Crab appeared from the water and began approaching us.

“We’ll see if it eats them or not. Everyone, get back.”

On Lord Glen’s orders, we all retreated to a spot that was a little higher on land. The crab ran at full speed to the Wonder Grape trees, then strained to grab a grape in its claws.

“It’s taking a while for the monster to get a grape to eat, just as we wanted. This will give you all more time to defeat them.”

Keeping an eye on the crab’s movements, Lord Glen stood up and cast a spell. “*Bind...*”

The Muscat Crab froze, unable to move.

“*Gust of Wind...*” He continued casting, using a wind spell to slice it vertically and end things.

Lord Glen walked towards the defeated crab.

“If we bring this back to Micah as a souvenir, wouldn’t she cook it for us?” he muttered.

“I think she would make something delicious,” I answered, prompting him to put the whole monster in his Item Box.

Once he’d seen the effects of the Wonderly Grapes, the mayor bowed his head towards Lord Glen. “My lord! Thank you so much for preparing such wonderful plants for us!”

“Thank you so much for them Salt Egg Seeds! Once the trees get all the salt outta the ground, I reckon our crops’ll grow marv’lously again!”! Thank you so much.”

“And with the Wonderly Grapes, we can beat up the monsters without causin’ any trouble with the vineyards. That’ll let us fishermen keep profits up, and keep them monsters from multiplyin’. Thank you, thank you so much!”

Both the farmer woman and the fisherman expressed their gratitude, but Lord Glen just shook his head and looked over to me. “This was all made possible by my fiancée Chelsea’s Skill. She should be the one you thank.”

“Huh?” While I was shocked from suddenly being included in the conversation, all three of them walked up to me and bowed.

“We’ll definitely return the favor. Thank you so very much!”

“Thank you!”

I looked up to Lord Glen in a panic as they did, but he just gave me a soft smile and patted me on the back.

“There shouldn’t be any issues with either of the seeds, but the monsters’ movements may change. I’d also like to know how the vineyards fare. Make sure to report it all.”

“Understood,” the mayor replied.

And so, our second day in the seaside town of Eins was over, having taken measures against both the salt damage and the monsters.

5. Souvenirs?

It was our third day in the seaside town of Eins. As we gathered our luggage and were getting into the carriage, we suddenly heard a fuss from outside.

“Your lordship!” It was the farmer’s representative woman from the day before. “We’ve got an incident!”

She was in a panic, trying to explain with hand gestures, but the words didn’t seem to be coming out.

“Please, calm down.” I comforted her, getting her to take a deep breath. She seemed to calm a bit after taking a few, then looked at me.

“All the Shine Muscat vines that’d been withered up are healthy again!”

“Huh?”

The Salt Egg plants are only supposed to take the salt out of the earth around them, not do anything to the Shine Muscat vines. What in the world happened?

I tilted my head in confusion, and Lord Glen did the same.

“Please, explain,” he said to the woman, who nodded back.

“After yesterday, I went back to check where the Salt Eggs’d been planted. I watched for a while, an’ after a bunch of fruit sprouted, it withered. Then, just when the one seed dropped, it sprouted an’ grew again! A few hours later, it did the exact same thing again!” the woman explained.

She pulled a bunch of white eggplant-like salt fruit out of her apron pocket.

“While that was happenin’, all of those Shine Muscat vines were still withered. But then I went again this mornin’, and everything close to where the Salt Eggs were planted was all lively!”

In the end, all we got out of what she said was that the Shine Muscat vines were healthy again the morning after.

“Should we go check on them?”

“Yeah...”

And so, Lord Glen and I went back to the grape vineyards. When we arrived, the sight we all saw was exactly as the farmer woman had described.

Lord Glen used his [Appraisal] Skill on the healthy vines, the Salt Egg trees, and even the earth and surrounding areas. Once he finished analyzing everything, he spoke to me.

“So for the Shine Muscat vines, they’re all well-nourished, and are just as healthy as they look.”

I looked at the fresh leaves, feeling happy.

“Next are the Salt Egg trees. Just as the farmer’s representative said, they’ve been withering and dropping their seeds every few hours.”

A seed would drop to the ground and sprout again. And the remaining twigs and leaves would wither, turning into smooth fertilizer for the new tree.

“Last is the ground. All of the salt in the earth around here has been absorbed from it,” he finished, looking at me. “Did you wish for the grown plants to wither into fertilizer when you created the seeds?”

I shook my head. “I had done that with the Blue and Sky Lilies, since that had been in the blueprints. But I haven’t wished it with any other plants,” I answered, thinking back to all of the things I’d planted. “Although, now that I think back... Every seed I’ve created since the Sky Lilies has turned into fertilizer upon withering.”

“So that trait just became a natural effect in your head,” Lord Glen said, pointing at the ground. “The wilted Salt Egg plants become fertilizer that improves the soil quality, and also brings other withered plants back to life. That’s why the Shine Muscat vines are all healthy again after just one night.”

I was surprised to hear that there were unintended effects.

“Shouldn’t we bring some of this back with us to the Research Institute to study in-depth?” I asked, getting a nod back.

“Tris would definitely be happy if we did.”

I couldn’t help but giggle when I imagined Lord Tris spreading the fertilizer.

“This’ll be a good souvenir for him.”

It seemed that every time I came home, I brought Lord Tris back a seed as a souvenir. “If possible, I’d like to buy something normal to bring home as a souvenir as well.”

Lord Glen smiled at my words. “Then let’s go check around the shops in Eins.”

“Yes, let’s.”

“One time a while ago, when I came for inspections, they were selling accessories made from shells and driftwood. Handkerchiefs dyed with grapes were popular too,” he said, muttering with a hand to his chin as he thought back. “Oh yeah. When I was making a reservation at the inn, I heard there were classes where you could make your own accessories with the shells you found beachcombing.”

“We could make our souvenirs ourselves? That sounds fun!”

And with that, we headed back into Eins to buy souvenirs to bring home for everyone.

Afterword

Long time no see, this is Milli-gram.

Thank you so much for buying *I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again!* volume 3! The entire novel was new text this time, and isn't up on "Shosetsuka ni Naro." I did my best to raise the sugar content, so I hope you enjoyed it.

This is only because we've come so far that I can say it, but when I first began writing this story, the plot was the complete opposite of what it is now. The heroine, loved by her family, had to go to the Royal Research Institute after her Skill was discovered. Busy every day, her catchphrase was, "I want to go home as soon as possible." I bet you can't even imagine the current Chelsea saying anything like that...

One day, as I wrote, a revelation from the gods(?) came to me, telling me to flip the plot. Normally, I'd just ignore it, saying, "I'll write what I want to write!" For some reason though, I went along with it, and before I realized, the current *I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again!* was born. You never know what the future brings. It made me think that sometimes going with the flow around you is good too.

Okay, let's get to the thanks!

First off, thank you to the illustrator, Yuki Kana-sensei, who drew our gorgeous cover art. (All of Chelsea's expressions in the illustrations were different this time, so I'd been looking forward to them from the rough sketch phase!) My editor, Y-san, who I caused a lot of deadline-related problems for; the salespeople, proofreaders, designers, and everyone at the print shop; my friends, R-san and M-san; my mom; and everyone in a certain game. (Especially the people who gave me food ideas! I'd never thought of crab cream croquettes or crab gratin before, so you were a big help.) And everyone who told me they were reading.

Thank you all so much!

There were also bits where I got too sick to write this time. Thank you to everyone who gave me advice and came to help. Everyone, make sure to pay careful attention to your health.

I hope good things happen to all of those who did anything involved in this book!

Milli-gram

I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again!

3

Author Milli-gram
Illustrator Yuki Kana





Tristano

A researcher with a
knack for [Earth Magic].

Maryfort

Deputy Commander of the Kingdom of
Chronowise's Second Order of Knights.



"I've
fallen
for you
at first
sight!
Please
be my
friend!"

Noel

A noble's daughter
Chelsea met at a party.



Chelsea

A girl appointed
to the position of
Research Fellow.



Glenarnold

Younger Brother of the
King of Chronowize.



As the night wore
on and most of the
lights in the Research
Institute went out,
the Communication
Spirit sparkled as it
flew through the air.

Bonus Short Stories

Omurice

It was the day after I'd learned that my wonderful kitchen was made thanks to Lord Glen putting a word in. I'd told him I'd like to express my gratitude for that, and he said he wanted to eat dinner in my room. It seemed like that would be thanks enough, though I didn't understand how.

I relayed this to Miss Micah, and she said, "Then you'll just have to help me~!"

Before I knew it, I was standing in the kitchen with an apron on.

"Um...I don't believe I'll be of much help to you..." I murmured. "I'd just get in the way..."

Miss Micah shook a finger at me. "Don't you worry, there are lots of things you can do~!" She set a bowl with cracked eggs inside and a whisk down in front of me. "I'd like for you to mix the egg whites until they're smooth~"

This doesn't look too hard. Mixing seemed like something even I could do.

"All right," I replied with a nod, getting a smile back.

"This is for the main dish, so do your best~!"

Huh? It's that important?! As I stood there shocked, Miss Micah started cooking the rest of the meal. With a firm nod to pump myself up, I focused on stirring the eggs until they were smooth.

After that, most of the things I helped with involved mixing.

Just about when dinner preparations were finished, Lord Glen came knocking. I greeted him at the door with my apron still on, and he just stared at me for a while. I tilted my head in confusion, and he chuckled happily.

"This is the first time I've seen you in an apron, but everything suits you, huh?"

Instantly, I could feel my face heat up from embarrassment.

“Th-Thank you very much,” I stammered.

I led him to the dining table, then returned to the kitchen to help with the finishing touches. Once I sprinkled parsley on the soup Miss Micah had dished up, everything was done!

“Thank you so much for all the help, Chelsea~! Micah’ll take care of the rest, so you go sit down~”

On her orders, I took my apron off and headed to the table myself. Sitting across from Lord Glen, I waited patiently before she came in with her cart and quickly set out all the food.

There was a salad topped with herb-roasted, peculiar-smelling chicken, and sweet pumpkin potage soup. The main course was omurice covered in demi-glace sauce, which made Lord Glen’s eyes light right up. Looking closer, I noticed him swallowing intensely.

“Do you like omurice, Lord Glen?” I asked.

“Yeah...I’ve always loved it,” he answered, nodding with a bashful smile.

It made him look unusually young. *So cute. But to think, I’m calling someone older than me cute...*

“Eat up, before it gets cold~!” Miss Micah urged.

I said my prayers to the earth gods before Lord Glen and I said in unison, “Thank you for the food.”

While I was sipping my soup, Lord Glen started stuffing his cheeks with omurice, his aqua eyes sparkling with excitement. Following his example, I tried the omurice myself. The combination of fluffy egg, ketchup rice, and rich demi-glace sauce was absolutely delicious.

As I ate, I felt Lord Glen’s gaze on me. I looked up at him, and he pointed to the corner of his own mouth. Realizing what he meant, I quickly wiped my mouth with a napkin, only to see demi-glace sauce left on it.

“If we weren’t sitting across from each other, I would’ve wiped it off for you,” he said with a chuckle.

I went silent, embarrassed as I imagined exactly that.

Cookie-Cutter Confections

Since my kitchen renovation was now complete, I quickly set off to make sweets with Miss Micah.

“For you, I’d suggest making cookie-cutter cookies~” she told me, lining various cookie cutters out on the table. “You just make the dough, use whichever cookie cutter you’d like to cut it with, and then bake~!”

There were so many shapes; it was fun just letting my eyes wander across them.

“Since you can make lots of cookies at once, and they last for days, they’re great for sharing~!” Miss Micah continued with a smile. It seemed she’d seen right through my plans to give them to Lord Glen.

“I’d love to make some,” I replied bashfully.

I put on my apron, washed my hands, and had her use *Clean* on me.

“Let’s get baking~!”

“Yes, please!”

Miss Micah squeezed her fists and raised them towards the ceiling, and I mimicked her. She then took the ingredients out of her Item Box and set them out on the table. Flour, sugar, butter, and one egg. *Looks like that’s it.*

“The most important thing about making sweets is measuring things exactly~”

She pulled a scale out and measured quantities of each ingredient before putting them each in bowls. Then, after shaking a bit of flour onto the table, she set out the butter to warm to room temperature.

“Now we mix them in order~” she continued, mixing all of the ingredients together before rolling the dough out flat for faster cooling and putting it in the fridge. “While it’s chilling, we’ll choose which cutters to use~ What do you want to use, Chelsea~?”

I looked at the various cutters on the table one by one. *I’ve seen these leaf-*

shaped and flower-shaped ones before at tea parties, but not the bunny or kitty-shaped animal ones. They're all so adorable. There are also butterflies, ribbons, crabs, sea shells, and fruits like strawberries and apples. I grumbled to myself, unable to make a choice. There are so many... I can't just pick one!

Miss Micah pulled out a box with a hole in it. "If you can't decide easily, we'll choose by draw~!" she said, putting all of the cutters inside the box. "Now, Chelsea, you just stick your hand in here and pull one out~!"

"O-Okay!" I put my hand inside, grabbing the first cookie cutter I touched. "It's heart-shaped."

"Then we'll use these big and small heart-shaped cutters too~"

After that, we used a rolling pin to stretch the dough out, then pushed in the heart-shaped cookie cutters to cut it, and finally, put the cookies in the oven to bake. After a few minutes, when we began to smell them, the cookies were taken out.

"Let's eat them fresh~" Miss Micah said, popping a hot, freshly-baked cookie into her mouth.

"They're so soft," I commented. *I can't believe how different they are from the crunchy cookies I usually eat.*

"This is the only moment you'll taste them this fresh~"

Since they were so yummy, I just had to have one.

"Now that they're cool, we'll wrap them so you can give them as a present~"

When she said that, I finally realized. *I'm giving Lord Glen cute, heart-shaped cookies...?* And it was the first homemade sweet I would be giving him too. Granted, it wasn't odd since we were engaged, but it was embarrassing nonetheless! We'd already cut and baked all of the dough with heart-shaped cookie cutters, so there was no going back.

And so, I ended up giving Lord Glen cookies with my face burning red.

The Cookies' Destination

The first thing I made after renovations were done was cookie-cutter cookies with Miss Micah. And, in an unexpected turn of events, they happened to be heart-shaped, of all things.

At Miss Micah's urging, I filled a gift bag with our creations. *I wanted Lord Glen to eat the first cookies I had ever baked, but...not like this*, I thought. *Heart-shaped obviously meant "I have feelings for you."* Aah, *this is so embarrassing, I don't want to give them to him! But I did want him to have some. What to do...*

While I was busy brooding over it, I finished wrapping them up.

"Now go on and give them to His Highness~!"

Pushed along by the foxwoman, I soon found myself in front of Lord Glen's office. The royal guard knights posted outside smiled when they saw me, and immediately knocked on the door. Lord Glen answered verbally, so I walked inside, still waffling over the issue.

"Hey, Chelsea. Isn't today your day off? What's up?" Lord Glen asked, smiling softly.

"Um, the truth is..." I hid the bag of cookies behind my back as he waited for me to continue with a smile. "I... I made cookies with Miss Micah."

The moment I said that, his eyes lit up.

"Do you mean you're going to let me eat the cookies you baked?" His expression gradually became more and more excited. If he had a tail, it definitely would have been wagging.

If he's looking forward to it this much, I can't not give them to him... If I don't, he'll definitely get depressed. Realizing this, I held the bag of cookies out to him.

"Please eat them if you'd like."

Accepting my offer, Lord Glen gave me a really wide smile. "Thank you. I'll eat one right now."

"Ah—"

Before I had a chance to say anything, he opened the bag and pulled out a bite-sized heart-shaped cookie. There was a sweet smell wafting about as he looked at it intently for a few seconds.

“Can I...take the shape to mean they’re full of your feelings for me...?”

“U-Umm... Yes...”

When I nodded, blushing, he smiled goofily. Then, he popped the cookie in his mouth and started crunching. After chewing it thoroughly, he swallowed, and cheerfully closed the bag of cookies.

“They’re delicious. Since they’re the first cookies you’ve ever baked, I’ll be sure to treasure them as I have some.”

“Wait, you don’t have to go that far! I’ll make more... So, um...please eat them right away!”

I couldn’t bear the thought of the heart-shaped cookies existing for long, even if they expressed my feelings for him. I begged him to eat them as soon as possible, but he wouldn’t listen.

Later I would learn that his Item Box had a time-stop feature, so my very first batch of cookies would stay fresh for years to come.

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I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again! Volume 3

by Milli-gram

Translated by Emily Hemphill Edited by Meiru

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